



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

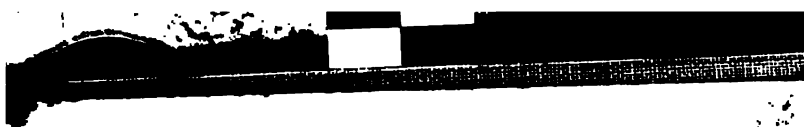
### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

# HIS MASTER PURPOSE

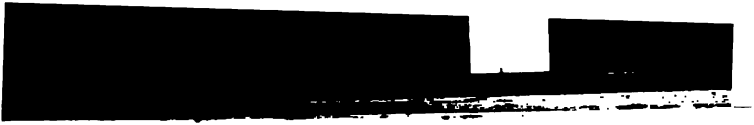
HAROLD BINDLOSS











## His Master Purpose



# His Master Purpose

By

Harold Bindloss

Author of

"In the Niger Country," "A Wide Dominion,"  
"Ainslie's Ju-Ju," "A Sower of Wheat,"  
"The Concession Hunters," Etc.



London

John Long

13 and 14 Norris Street, Haymarket

1903





## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. "THURSTAN'S FOLLY" . . . . .	7
II. A DISILLUSION . . . . .	19
III. GEOFFREY'S FIRST CONTRACT . . . . .	29
IV. GEOFFREY MAKES PROGRESS. . . . .	41
V. THE LEGENDS OF CROSBIE GHYLL . . . . .	53
VI. THE BREAKING OF THE JAM. . . . .	66
VII. A REST BY THE WAY. . . . .	77
VIII. GEOFFREY STANDS FIRM . . . . .	88
IX. SAVINE'S CONFIDENCE . . . . .	97
X. AN INSPIRATION . . . . .	106
XI. GEOFFREY TESTS HIS FATE. . . . .	119
XII. A TEST OF LOYALTY . . . . .	130
XIII. THE WORK OF AN ENEMY . . . . .	143
XIV. A GREAT UNDERTAKING . . . . .	154
XV. MILLICENT TURNS TRAITRESS . . . . .	165
XVI. THE INFATUATION OF ENGLISH JIM . . . . .	176
XVII. THE BURSTING OF THE SLUICE . . . . .	187
XVIII. THE ABDUCTION OF BLACK CHRISTY . . . . .	199
XIX. UNDER THE STANLEY PINES . . . . .	210
XX. REPARATION . . . . .	220

## Contents

CHAP.	PAGE
XXI. A REPRIEVE . . . . .	230
XXII. THE ULTIMATUM . . . . .	242
XXIII. AN UNEXPECTED ALLY . . . . .	252
XXIV. MILLICENT'S REVOLT . . . . .	262
XXV. A RECKLESS JOURNEY . . . . .	272
XXVI. MRS SAVINE SPEAKS HER MIND . . . . .	283
XXVII. LESLIE STEPS OUT . . . . .	293
XXVIII. A REVELATION . . . . .	303



# His Master Purpose

## CHAPTER I

### "THURSTAN'S FOLLY"

IT was a gradely pity young Geoffrey Thurstan was following in his grandfather's footsteps, the sturdy dalefolk said, and several of them shook their heads solemnly as they repeated the observation when one morning the man in question came striding down the steep street of a village in the North Country. The cluster of grey stone houses nestled beneath the scarred face of a crag, and, because mining operations had lately been suspended and work was scarce just then, pale-faced men in moleskin lounged about the slate slab doorsteps, basking in the sun. Above them, and beyond the summit of the crag, the mouth of a tunnel formed a black blot on the sunlit slopes of sheep-cropped grass stretching up to the heather, which gave place in turn to rock out-crop on the shoulders of the fell. The loungers regarded it regretfully, for that mine had furnished most of them with their daily bread.

"It's in t' blood," said one. "Ay, headstrong folly's bred in t' bone of them, an' it's safer to counter an angry bull than a Thurstan of Crosbie Ghyll. It's like his grandfather—roughed out of the old hard whinstane he is."

A murmur of approval followed, for the listeners knew there was a measure of truth in this; but it

## His Master Purpose

ceased when the pedestrian passed them close with long, vigorous strides. Though several raised their hands half-way to their caps in grudging salute, Geoffrey Thurstan, who appeared preoccupied, glanced at none of them. He was a young man, though there were lines on his forehead and his brows were wrinkled down over his eyes, while his carriage suggested strength of limb and energy. Though tall, his frame looked wiry rather than heavily built. His face was resolute, for both square jaw and steady brown eyes suggested tenacity of purpose, while the hands that swung at his sides had been roughened by labour with pick and drill. Yet in spite of the old clay-stained shooting suit and shapeless slouch hat with the grease on the front of it, where a candle had been set, there was a stamp of command, and even refinement, about him. He was a Thurstan of Crosbie, one of a family which had long worked their own diminishing lands among the rugged fells that stretch between the West Riding and the Solway.

The Thurstans had been a reckless, hard-living race, with a stubborn combative disposition, which most had found scope for in wresting a few more barren acres from the grasp of moss and moor; but several times an eccentric genius had scattered to the winds what the rest had won, and Geoffrey seemed bent on playing the traditional rôle. There were, however, excuses for him. He was an ambitious man, and had studied mechanical science under a famous engineer, while, perhaps because the surface yielded a sustenance so grudgingly, a love of burrowing was born in the family. Copper was also dear just then, the speculative public well disposed towards British mines, while, when prices current permitted it, a little copper had been worked from time immemorial in the depths of Crosbie Fell. So Geoffrey, continuing where his grandfather had ceased, drove the ancient adit deeper into the hill, mortgaging field by field to pay for tools and men, until, when

## “Thurstan’s Folly”

the little property had well-nigh gone, he came upon a fault or break in the strata which made further progress almost impossible.

When Thurstan reached the mouth of the adit he turned and looked down upon the poor climbing meadows under the great shoulder of the Fell. Beyond these, a few weatherbeaten buildings, forming a rude quadrangle pierced by one tall archway, stood beside a tarn that winked like polished steel, and he sighed as his glance rested upon them. For many generations they had sheltered the Thurstans of Crosbie, but unless he could stoop to soil his hands in a fashion his pride revolted from, they would own a stranger master before many months had gone. Then an angry glitter came into his eyes, and his face grew set, as, placing a lighted candle in his hat, he moved forward into the black adit. Twenty minutes had passed when he stood beside a mining engineer of more repute for skill than character on the brink of a chasm where some movement of the earth’s crust had rent the rocks asunder.

Both men had donned coarse overalls, and mining-expert Melhuish held his candle so that its light fell upon his companion as well as the dripping surface of the rock. Moisture fell from the wet stone into the gloomy rift, and a faint monotonous splashing rose up from far below. Melhuish, however, was watching Thurstan too intently to notice anything else. He was a middle-aged man, with pale, puffy face and avaricious eyes, well-known to speculative financiers who made much more than the shareholders did out of the new mining companies they honoured with their attention.

“It’s interesting geologically: wholly abnormal considering the stratification, though very unfortunate for you,” he said. “I give you my word of honour that when I advised you to push on the heading I never expected this. However, there it is, and unless you’re open to consider certain sugges-



## His Master Purpose

tions already made, I can't see much use in wasting any more money. As I said, my friends would, under the circumstances, treat you fairly."

Thurstan's face grew impassive, and Melhuish, who fancied that his companion bore himself with somewhat curious equanimity for a ruined man whose age was well under thirty, did not see that his hard fingers were clenched savagely on the handle of a pick.

"I fancied you understood my opinions, and I haven't changed them," said Geoffrey. "I asked you to meet me here to-day to consider whether the ore in sight already would be worth reduction, and you say No. You can advise your friends, when you see them, that I'm not inclined to assist them in a deliberate fraud upon the public."

Melhuish laughed. "You are exaggerating, and the public seem perfectly willing to pay for their experience, whether they acquire it over copper, lead or tin. Besides, there's an average commercial probability of somebody finding good ore if they go down far enough, and your part would be easy. You take a moderate price as vendor, we advancing enough to settle the mortgage, sign the papers my friends will send you, and keep your mouth shut."

"And their expert wouldn't see that fault?" asked Geoffrey, and Melhuish smiled pityingly before he answered,—

"The gentlemen I speak of keep an expert in their pocket who certainly wouldn't see any more than was necessary, while the indications that deceived me are good enough for anybody. Human judgment is always liable to error, and there are ways of framing a report without committing the reporter. May I repeat that it's a fair business risk, and whoever takes this mine over, should, though I can't guarantee they will, strike the lead if they pour in sufficient capital, while it would be desirable for you to act judiciously. My financial friends have, I understand, been in communication with the people who hold your mortgages."

## “Thurstan’s Folly”

Geoffrey’s temper, always fiery, had been sorely tried of late, and, dropping his pick, he gripped the tempter by the shoulder with fingers that held him like a vice. He also pressed him backwards until the pair stood within a foot of the verge of the black rift, and Melhuish’s face was gray in the candle-light as he heard the dislodged pebbles splash sullenly into the water, fathoms beneath. He had heard stories of the vagaries of the Thurstans of Crosbie, and it was most unpleasant to stand, as it were, on the brink of eternity, in the grasp of one of them.

Then Geoffrey dropped his hand, saying quietly, “You need better nerves in your business, Melhuish, and one would hardly have fancied you would have been so startled at a harmless joke intended to test them for you. There have been several spendthrifts and highly successful drunkards among us, but with the exception of my namesake, who was hanged like a Jacobite gentleman for taking their despatches, sword in hand, from two of Cumberland’s dragoons, we have hitherto drawn the line at stealing.”

“I’m not interested in genealogy, and don’t appreciate jests of that species,” said Melhuish, somewhat shakily. “I’ll take your word that you meant it so, and request further and careful consideration before you return a definite answer to my friends’ suggestions.”

“You shall have it in a few days,” said Geoffrey; and Melhuish, who determined to receive the answer under the open sunlight, with, if possible, assistance in the vicinity, turned towards the mouth of the adit, walking, because he thought it wiser, behind Geoffrey.

The afternoon was not yet over when Thurstan stood leaning on the back of a garden chair outside a quaint old hall, which had once been a feudal fortalice, and was now attached to an unprofitable farm. Autumn had lingered unusually long that year, and the sun was still faintly warm, while, because the impoverished gentleman who held a long lease of it let one wing of the building to certain



## His Master Purpose

sportsmen, several of his neighbours and so-styled guests had gathered on the indifferently-kept lawn on the excuse of a tennis match. Miss Millicent Austin sat with a shawl about her shapely shoulders in an angle of the seat, her little feet encased in singularly neat white shoes reposing upon a cushion one of the sportsmen had insisted on bringing her. Her hands lay idly folded in her lap, and matched the feet. They were characteristic of herself, for Millicent Austin was slight and dainty, with pale gold hair and pink and white complexion, though some of her rivals said the colour of her eyes was too watery a china blue. They also added that the said optics were nevertheless very quick to notice where their owner's interest lay.

An indefinite engagement had long existed between her and the man beside her, and both had, apparently at one time cherished a degree of affection for the other ; but when the merry, high-spirited girl returned from London changed into a calculating woman, Geoffrey was bound up, mind and body, in his mine, and Millicent began to wonder whether, with her advantages, she might not do better than marry a dalesman burdened by heavy debts. They formed a curious contrast, the man brown-haired, brown-eyed, hard-handed, rugged of feature, and sometimes rugged of speech ; and the dainty woman who seemed born for a life of ease and luxury.

"Beauty and the beast!" said one fair visitor to her companion as she laid by her racquet. "I suppose he has the money?"

"Unless his mine proves successful I don't think either will have much ; but if Miss Austin is a beauty in a mild way, he's a noble beast, one very likely to turn the tables upon a rash hunter," was the answer. "And yet he's stalking blindly into the snare. Alas, poor lion!"

"You seem interested in him. I'm not partial to wild beasts myself," said her companion ; and the other smiled as she answered,—

## “Thurstan’s Folly”

“Hardly that, but I know the family history, and they are a curious race with great capabilities for good or evil. It all depends upon how they are led, because nobody could drive a Thurstan. It is rather, I must confess, an instinctive prejudice against the woman beside him. I do not like, and would not trust, Miss Austin, though, of course, except to you, my dear, I would not say so.”

The young speaker glanced a moment towards the pair, and then passed on with a slight frown upon her honest face, for Thurstan bent over his companion with something that suggested deadly earnestness in his very attitude, and the spectator assumed that Millicent Austin’s head was turned away from him, because she possessed a fine profile rather than excessive diffidence. Neither was the observer wrong, for Millicent did little without a purpose, and was just then thinking keenly as she said,—

“I am very sorry to hear about your misfortune, Geoffrey, but there is a way of escape from most disasters if one will look for it, you know, and if you came to terms with them I understand those London people would, at least, recoup you for your expenditure.”

“You heard of that?” said Geoffrey, sharply, displeased that his *fiancée*, who had been away lately, should betray so accurate a knowledge of all that concerned the main chance.

“Of course I did. I made Tom tell me. You will agree with them, will you not?”

“No,” said Geoffrey, with a slight huskiness. “I wish I could, but it is impossible, and I am not pleased that Tom should tell you what I was waiting to do myself. Let that pass, for I want you to listen to me. The old holding will have to go, and there is little room for a poor man in this overcrowded country. As you know, certain property will revert to me eventually, but remembering what is in our blood I dare not trust myself to drag out a life of idleness or monotonous drudgery, waiting for the

## His Master Purpose

future here. The curse is a very real thing—and it would not be fair to you. Now I can save enough from the wreck to start us without positive hardship over seas, and George has written offering me a small share in his Australian cattle-run. You shall want for nothing, Millicent, that toil can win you, and I know that, with you to help me, I shall at least achieve a competence."

Millicent, who glanced up at him in sidelong fashion, could see that the man spoke with conviction, and knew his power of effort and dogged obstinacy would carry him far towards the obtaining of whatever he set his heart upon. Then she dropped her long lashes as he continued,—

"Hitherto I have overcome the taint I spoke of—you knew what it was when you gave me your promise—and working hard, with you to cheer me, in a new land under the open sun, I shall crush it utterly. Semi-poverty, with an ill-paid task that demanded but half my energies, would try you, Millicent, and be dangerous to me. Sounds very selfish, doesn't it—but you will come?"

There was an appeal in his voice which touched the listener. It was seldom a Thurstan of Crosbie asked help from anyone; but she had no wish to encourage him in what she considered his folly, and shook her head with a pretty assumption of petulance.

"Don't be sensational, Geoffrey. You are prone to exaggeration, and, of course, I will not come. How could I help you to chase wild cattle, for instance? Now, try to be sensible, and come to terms with these company people, and then you need not go."

"Would you have me a thief?" asked Geoffrey, gazing almost fiercely down upon her, and the girl shrank from him a little.

"No, but, so far as I understand it, this is an ordinary business transaction, and if these people are willing to buy the mine, why should you refuse?"

## "Thurstan's Folly"

If Thurstan was less in love with his companion than he had been, he hardly realised it then. He was disappointed, and his forehead contracted as he struggled with as heavy a temptation as could have assailed the honour of any unfortunate man. Millicent was very fair to look upon, and she, in turn, favoured him with a glance of entreaty which enhanced her comeliness.

Nevertheless he answered wearily, "It is not an ordinary business transaction. These people would pay me with the general public's money, and when the mine proves profitless, as it certainly will, would turn the deluded shareholders loose on me."

"There are always risks in mining," said Millicent, suggestively. "The investing public understand that, don't they? Of course, I would not have you dishonest, but, Geoffrey—"

Thurstan was patient in action, but seldom in speech, and he broke out hotly, "Many a woman has sent a man to his damnation for a little luxury, but I expected help from you. Millicent, if I assist those swindlers and stay here dragging out the life of a gentleman pauper on a dole of stolen money, I shall go down and down, dragging you with me. If you will come out with me, I know you will never regret it. Whatever is best worth winning over there, I will win it for you. Can't you see we stand at the cross-roads, and whichever we chose there can be no turning back! Think, and for God's sake think well. The decision means everything to you and me."

Again Millicent was sensible of an unwilling admiration for the speaker, if she had little for his sentiments. He stood erect, with a grim look on his face, his nostrils quivering, and his lips firmly set—stubborn, vindictive, powerful. Though his strength was untrained yet, she knew he was a man to trust, great in his very failings, with no meanness in his composition, and clearly born for risky enterprise and hazardous toil. She was also a little afraid of him, which was not in itself unpleasant, but she

## His Master Purpose

feared poverty and hardship more, and answered with a shrug of the shoulder on which he laid his hand,—

"I think you are absurd to-day, and you are hurting me. This melodramatic pose approaches the ludicrous, and I have really no patience with your folly. A space of calm reflection may prove beneficial, and I will leave you to it. Clara is beckoning me."

She turned away, and Thurstan, after looking round for Clara in vain, stalked sullenly into the hall, where he flung himself down in a chair beside an open window, about which a few pale roses were nodding still. It did not please him to see Millicent take her place before the net and hear her laugh ring lightly across the lawn. A certain sportsman, who had devoted himself to Miss Austin's service, and now sat in a corner, watched him narrowly before he said, "You look badly hipped over something, Thurstan. Suppose it's the mine, and would like to offer my sympathy. Might I recommend a brandy-and-soda, one of those Cubanos, and confidence? Tom left the bottles handy for you."

Thurstan, in spite of the family failing, or perhaps because it was the only thing he feared, had hitherto been an abstemious man. Now, however, he emptied one stiff tumbler at a gulp, and the soda frothed in the second, when, for just a moment he noticed a curious smile in the eyes of his companion. It vanished immediately, but Thurstan had seen and remembered, and it was characteristic of him that, before two more seconds had passed, the glass crashed into splinters in the grate. It also alighted in the centre of the grate. Thurstan was subject to fits of passion, but they rarely rendered useless his faculties.

"Quite right!" said Leslie, nodding. "When one feels as you evidently do, a little of that consolation is considerably better than too much. You don't, however, appear to be in a companionable humour, and perhaps I had better not intrude on you."

## “Thurstan’s Folly”

During the rest of the afternoon, Thurstan saw little of Millicent and Leslie much, while, when the latter joined one of the two damsels who had witnessed the opening of the first scene, he said, “Something has gone badly wrong with Thurstan, and he was destroying my worthy host’s glassware when I last saw him. Isn’t there a strain of, we’ll say, eccentricity in all that family?”

“You are on dangerous ground,” answered the fair listener, with an evanescent flash in her eyes. “I am related to Geoffrey Thurstan, and can, at least, vouch for his perfect sanity. He has many excellent qualities, and only needs the taming and polishing he probably will not get until he marries.”

“I should be inclined to pity the woman who undertook it,” said Leslie, drily.

The weather had changed suddenly when at dusk Geoffrey rode home, and, in forecast of winter, a little bitter breeze sighed across the heather and set the harsh grasses moaning eerily. The sky was sombre overhead; scarred fell and towering pike had faded to blurs of dingy grey, and the ghostly whistling of curlew emphasised the emptiness of the darkening moor. Its mood suited Geoffrey’s, and he rode slowly with loose bridle and sweat upon his forehead in spite of the cold. The bouquet of the brandy had awakened a longing he dreaded within him, and though, hitherto, he had been too intent upon his task to trouble about his character, it was borne in upon him that he must stand fast now or never. But it was not the thought of his own future which first appealed to him. Those who had gone before him had rarely counted consequences when tempted by either wine or women, and he would have risked that freely. Geoffrey was, however, in his own eccentric fashion, a just man, and he dare not risk bringing disaster upon Millicent. So he rode slowly, thinking hard, until the horse, which seemed infected with its master’s restlessness, plunged as a dark figure rose out of the heather.

## His Master Purpose

"Hallo, is it you, Evans?" said the rider, with a hollow laugh. "I thought it was the devil. He's abroad to-night."

"Thou'rt wrang, Mr Geoffrey," answered the game-keeper. "It's Thursday night he comes. Black Jim as broke thy head for thee is coming with t' quarrymen to poach t' covers. Got the office from yan with a grudge against t' gang, an' Captain Franklin, who's layin' for him, sends his compliments, thinkin' as maybe thee would like t' fun."

Thurstan rarely forgot either an injury or a friend, and during the preceding October, when tripping, he fell helpless, Black Jim had twice, with murderous intent, brought his gun-butt down on his unprotected skull. Excitement was also at all times as wine to him, so, promising to attend at the rendezvous, he rode homewards faster than before, with a sense of anticipation which helped to dull the edge of his care.

## CHAPTER II

### A DISILLUSION

IT was a clear cold night, hardly suitable to Black Jim's purpose, for each sound carried far through the silence that brooded heavily over fellside and valley, when Geoffrey Thurstan met Captain Franklin, who held certain sporting rights in the vicinity, at the place agreed upon. The latter brought with him several amateur assistants and stable-hands besides two stalwart keepers, and, greeting Thurstan, said,—

"Very good of you to help me! Our local constable is either afraid or powerless, and I must accordingly allow Black Jim's rascals to sweep my covers or take the law into my own hands. It is the pheasants he is after now, and he'll start early so as to get his plunder off from the junction by the night mail, and because the moon rises soon. We had better divide, and you might come with Evans and me to the beeches while the others search the fir spinney."

Geoffrey, assenting, followed the officer across a dew-damped meadow and up a winding lane hung with gossamer-decked briars, until the party halted, ankle-deep among withered leaves, in a dry ditch just outside the wood. There were reasons why each detail of all which happened that eventful night should impress itself upon Geoffrey's memory, and he could recall it long afterwards, when wandering far out in the shadow of limitless forests or the chill of eternal snow. Leaves that made crimson glories by day still clung low down about the wide-girthed trunks beyond the straggling hedge of ancient thorns,





## His Master Purpose

but the higher branches rose nakedly against faintly luminous indigo. The spruce firs among them formed clumps of solid blackness, and here and there a dim and delicate tracery of birch boughs filled gaps against the sky-line between. The meadows behind him were silent and empty, streaked with belts of spectral mist, and, because it was not very late yet, he could see a red glimmer of light in the windows of Barrow Hall.

But if the grass told no story it was otherwise with the wood, for Geoffrey could hear the rabbits thumping in their burrows among the roots of the thorn. Twice a cock-pheasant uttered a drowsy, raucous crow, and there was a blundering of unseen feathery bodies among the spruce, while, when this ceased, he heard a water-hen flutter with feet splashing across a hidden pool. Then heavy stillness followed, intensified by the clamour of a beck which came foaming down the side of a fell until, clattering loudly, wood-pigeons, neither asleep nor wholly awake, drove out against the sky, wheeled and fell clumsily into the wood again. All this was a plain warning, and keeper Evans nodded agreement when Captain Franklin said,—

"There's somebody here, and in order not to miss them we'll divide our forces once more. If you'll go in by the Hall footpath, Thurstan, and whistle on sight of anything suspicious, I'd be much obliged to you."

A few minutes later Thurstan halted on the topmost step of the lofty stile by which a footpath from the Hall entered the wood. Looking back across misty grass land and swelling ridges of heather, he could see a faint brightness behind the eastern rim of the moor; but, when he stepped down, it was very dark among the serried trunks. The slender birches had faded utterly, the stately beeches resembled dim ghosts of trees and only the spruces retained, imperfectly, their shape and form. Thurstan was, however, country bred and lifting high his feet to

## A Disillusion

clear bramble trailer and fallen twig, walked by feeling instead of sight. The beck moaned a little more loudly, and there was a heavy astringent odour of damp earth and decaying leaves. Beast and bird were still again, and it seemed as if Nature, worn out by the productive effort of summer, were sinking under solemn silence into her winter sleep. Still, the watcher knew the wood was a large one and unlawful visitants might well be hidden towards its farther end. He stood still at intervals, concentrating all his powers to listen, but his ears told him nothing until at last there was a rustle somewhere ahead. Instantly he sank down behind an ash, puzzled by the sound, which reminded him of something curiously out of place in the lonely wood. It was certainly not made by withered bracken or bramble leaves, and had nothing to do with the stealthy fall of a poacher's heavy boot.

It came again more clearly, and Thurstan was almost sure that it was the rustle of a woven fabric, such as a woman's dress. To confirm this opinion a soft laugh followed, a woman's laugh, and he rose, deciding it could only be some assignation with a maid from the Hall, and no business of his. He had turned to retreat when he noticed the eastern side of a silver fir reflect a faint shimmer, and, glancing along the beam of light that filtered through a fantastic fretwork of delicate birch twigs arching a drive, saw a broad, bright disc hanging low above the edge of the moor. As he did so it struck him that perhaps the poachers had used the girl to coax information out of a young groom or keeper, and she was now warning them. So he waited, debating, because he was a rudely chivalrous person, how he might secure her companion without, at least in the meantime, involving the girl's disgrace, until again a laugh rose from beyond a thicket followed by the voice of a man.

Geoffrey was puzzled by both, for the laugh was musical, unlike a rustic giggle, and though the calling

## His Master Purpose

of the beck partly drowned it, the man's voice did not resemble that of a labourer. He moved again, wondering if it was not some affair of Leslie's from the Hall, and he had better slip away after all. The birch boughs sighed a little, there was a fluttering down of withered leaves, and he remained undecided, gripping his stout oak cudgel by the middle. Then the hot blood pulsed fiercely through every artery, for the voice rose once more, harsh and clear this time, with almost a threat in the tone, and there was no possibility of doubting that the speaker was Leslie.

"This cannot continue, Millicent," it said. "It has gone on too long, and I will not be trifled with. You cannot have both of us, and my patience is exhausted. Leave the fool to his folly."

Geoffrey raised the cudgel and dropped it to his side, turning suddenly cold, and remained for a second or two almost without power of thought or motion. Afterwards, he would sometimes wonder in another land whether he had really been in love with Millicent at all, and decided he had probably not been, though he considered himself so at the time. Millicent was fair to look upon, and knew how to make herself very pleasant to any man worth judicious flattery. He had admired her greatly, but he was probably more bound up in his mine than he would then have been in any woman, and, though ambitious chiefly for her sake, the task he had undertaken came first with him.

Nevertheless the disillusion was cruel, and when the woman's answer filled him with returning fury hurled himself at a thicket from which, amid a crash of branches, he reeled out into sight of the pair. The moon was well clear of the moor now, and silver light and inky shadow chequered the mosses of the drive. With a little scream of terror Millicent sprang apart from her companion's side and stood for a space staring at the man who had appeared out of the rent-down undergrowth. The pale light beat upon his face, showing it was white with anger, his eyes were

## A Disillusion

bloodshot, and looking from him she glanced towards Leslie, who waited in the partial shadow of a hazel bush. Even had he desired to escape, which was possible, the bush would have cut off his retreat.

Geoffrey turned fiercely from one to the other—the woman, who stood with one hand on a birch branch, evidently struggling to regain her courage, her lips twitching and her pale blue eyes very wide open—the man shrinking back as far as possible in a manner which suggested physical fear. He had heard the dalesfolk say a savage devil, easily aroused, lurked in all the Thurstans, and the one before him looked distinctly dangerous just then. Leslie was weak in limb as well as moral fibre, and it was Geoffrey who broke the painful silence.

“What are you doing here at such an hour with this man, Millicent?” he asked very sternly. “No answer! It appears that some explanation is certainly due to me—and I mean to force it out of one of you.”

Millicent, saying nothing, gazed at her companion, as though conjuring him to speak plainly and end an intolerable position; and Geoffrey read her meaning, if Leslie, who glanced longingly over his shoulder down the drive, refused to do so. Then, because there was spirit in her, and she had recovered from the first shock of surprise, she ground one little heel into the mosses with a gesture of disgust and anger when the man made answer, “I resent your attitude and question. We came out to see the moon rise on the moor, and found the night breeze nipping.”

Geoffrey laughed harshly before he repeated, “You found the breeze nipping! There is scarcely an air astir. And you understand the relations existing between Miss Austin and me? I want a better reason. Millicent, you, at least, are not a coward—dare you give it me?”

“I challenge your right to demand an account of my actions,” said the girl, commencing with an evident effort to continue recklessly, after a pause,

## His Master Purpose

"But the explanation must have come sooner or later, and you shall have it now. I have grown—perhaps the brutal truth is best—tired of you and your folly. You would sacrifice my future to your fantastic pride—and this man would give up everything for me."

The first heat of Geoffrey's passion was over, and he was now coldly savage at the woman's treachery, while, as he stood, a tall, lean figure, looking down upon the pair with ironical contempt, Millicent began to wonder if she had chosen well. Long afterwards she also told her companion that it was then she first suspected her mistake.

"Including his conscience and honour, but not his personal safety!" said Geoffrey. "Millicent, one could almost admire you—but are you struck dumb, you, that you let the woman speak? This was my promised wife you have been making love to,—though, for delicacy would be superfluous, it is evident that she has not discouraged you. Until three days ago I could have trusted my life to her. Now, I presume, she has pledged herself to you?"

"Yes," said Leslie, recovering his equanimity as his fears grew less oppressive, and commenced a disconnected series of excuses which Geoffrey cut short with a gesture.

"Then, even if I desired to make them, my protests would be useless," he said. "I am at least grateful for your frankness, Millicent. It prevented me wringing the truth from your somewhat abject lover, and, as no doubt you would remind me, the day when men could settle such questions without the aid of a lawyer has unfortunately gone. Perhaps women were worth a little blood-letting then. Had you told me honestly when this man first spoke to you, that you had grown tired of me, I would, releasing you, have tried to bear it patiently and wish you well. Now I can only say, that at least you know the worst of each other—and there will be less disappointment when you commence stripped of either mutual or self respect. But I was forgetting.

## A Disillusion

Franklin's keepers are searching the wood. Some of them might talk, and your aunt is jealous of her name. Go at once by the Hall path, as softly as you can."

The pair were plainly glad to hurry away, and Geoffrey waited until, when the sound of their footsteps grew scarcely audible, a very faint rustling indicated that somebody with a knowledge of woodcraft was forcing a passage through the undergrowth. Thereupon he broke a dry twig at intervals as he progressed in one direction, then dropped on hands and knees to cross a strip of open sward at an angle to his previous course, and lay still in the black shadow of a spruce. It was evident that somebody was following his trail, and even then he could smile, for the pursuer, passing, his hiding-place, followed it straight on. Geoffrey's was a curious character, and the very original cure for a disappointment in love, that of baffling a game watcher while his faithless mistress escaped, brought him relief. It left no time for reflection, occupying all his faculties as it did.

Next he dashed across a bare strip of velvet mosses and rabbit-cropped turf, slipped between the roots of the hedge, and running silently beneath it halted several score yards away face to face with the astonished keeper.

"Weel, I'm danged; this clean beats me," gasped that worthy. "Hello, behind there. It's only Mr Geoffrey, sir. Didst see Black Jim slip out this way, or hear a scream a laal while gone by?"

"No," said Geoffrey, "but I heard the scream. It was not unlike a hare squealing in a snare. You and I must have been stalking each other, Evans, and Black Jim can't be here."

The rest came up as they spoke, and Captain Franklin said, "You seem badly disappointed at missing your old enemy, Thurstan. Never saw you look so savage. I expect Black Jim has tricked us after all."

"I've had several troubles lately, and don't find

## His Master Purpose

much amusement in hunting poachers who aren't there," said Geoffrey. "You will excuse me coming back with you."

He departed across the meadows at a swinging pace, and the keeper, who stared after him, commented, "Something gradely wrang with Mr Geoffrey to-night. They're an ill folk to counter yon, and it's maybe as well for Black Jim as Mr Geoffrey didn't get hold on him."

Geoffrey saw no more of Millicent, but he once visited her younger sister, a gentle invalid, who, because of the friendship which had long existed between them said, "You must try to believe I mean it in kindness when I say that I am not wholly sorry, Geoffrey. You and Millicent would never have got on well together, and while I wish it could have happened in a more creditable way, you will realise—when somebody else makes you happy—that all has been for the best."

"That day will be long in coming," said the man, grimly, though he desired to be gentle, and the sick girl laid a thin white hand on his hard one as she answered him.

"It is not a flattering speech, and you must not lose faith in all of us. Lying still here helpless, I have often thought about both of you, and I feel that you have done well in choosing a new life in a new country. When you go out, Geoffrey, you will take my fervent wishes for your welfare with you."

Janet Austin was frail and worn thin by pain, but her pale face flushed a little as the man suddenly stooped and touched her forehead with his lips.

"God bless you for your kindly heart," he said. "A ruined man has very few friends, and many acquaintances waiting to convince him that his downfall is the result of his own folly, but"—and he straightened his wiry frame, while his eyes glinted—"they have not seen the end, and even if beaten, there is satisfaction in a stubborn, single-handed struggle."

## A Disillusion

Janet Austin, perhaps thinking of her own helplessness, sighed as she answered, "I do not think you will be beaten, Geoffrey, but if you will take advice from me, remember that over-confidence in your powers and the pride that goes with it may cost you many a minor victory. Good-bye, and good luck, Geoffrey. You will remember me."

That very afternoon, while Thurstan was in the midst of preparations to leave his native land, the mining engineer called upon him with a provincial newspaper in his hand. "I suppose this is your answer?" he said, laying his finger on a paragraph.

"Mr G. Thurstan, who has, in the face of many difficulties, attempted to exploit the copper vein in Crosbie Fell, has been compelled to close the mine," the printed lines ran. "We understand he came upon an unexpected break in the strata, coupled with a subsidence which practically precludes the possibility of following the lost lead with any hope of commercial success. He has, therefore, placed his affairs in the hands of Messrs Lonsdale & Routh, solicitors, and, we understand, intends emigrating. His many friends and former employees wish him success."

"Yes," he answered drily, "I sent them the information, also London financial papers a copy. Considering the interest displayed just now in British mines, they should insert a paragraph. I've staked down your backers' game in return for your threats, and you may be thankful you have come off so easily. Your cheque is ready. It is the last you will ever get from me."

The expert smiled almost good-naturedly. "You needn't have taken so much trouble, Thurstan," he said. "The exploitation of your rabbit burrow would only have been another drop in the bucket to my correspondents, and it's almost a pity we can't be friends, for, with some training, your sledge-hammer style would make its mark in the ring."





## His Master Purpose

"Thanks!" said Geoffrey. "I'm not fishing for compliments, and it's probably no use repeating my motives—you wouldn't understand them. Still, in future, don't set down every man commonly honest as an uncommon fool. If I ever had much money, which is hardly likely, I should fight extremely shy of any investments recommended by your friends!"



## CHAPTER III

### GEOFFREY'S FIRST CONTRACT

It was springtime among the mountains which, glistening coldly white and wrapped about their mighty shoulders with mantles of eternal snow, towered above the deep-sunk valley, when one morning Geoffrey Thurstan limped painfully out of a redwood forest of British Columbia. The boom of a hidden river set the pine sprays quivering. A blue grouse was drumming deliriously on the top of a stately fir, and the morning sun drew clean, healing odours from balsam and cedar. The scene was characteristic of what is now the grandest and wildest, as it will some day be the richest, province of the Canadian Dominion.

The serene majesty of snow-clad heights and grandeur of vast shadowy aisles with groined roofs of red branches and mighty colonnades of living trunks were, however, partly lost upon the traveller who had trudged wearily over rough railroad ballast, which cruelly galled his feet, most of the preceding night. He had acquired Colonial experience hardly, working throughout the winter in an Ontario logging camp, which is a very rough school, and of other kinds he had probably had as much as was good for him, having spent several anxious years exhausting his patrimony in a struggle to develop a profitless mine, and on abandoning it, discovered himself ruined and jilted within the same forty-eight hours. Thurstan, however, was obstinate and combative, and disaster rather braced him to renewed effort than reduced his energies. So when an hour earlier,

## His Master Purpose

the man, to visit whom he had undertaken an eight-league journey, had laughed in his face when he offered to drain a lake which flooded his ranch, Thurstan, saying nothing, but looking grimmer than ever, continued his weary journey in search of sustenance.

Still, he frowned a little as he flung himself down beneath a fir, for shimmering like polished steel between the giant trees, the glint of water caught his eye, and the blue wood smoke curling over the house on a distant slope suggested the usual plentiful Colonial breakfast. Now, if Geoffrey's male forbears had been reckless men, his mother had transmitted him a strain of north-country canniness, and while the remnant of his poor possessions, converted into currency, lay in a Canadian bank to provide working capital, its owner, finding no scope for his mental abilities, wandered here and there endeavouring to sell the strength of his body for daily bread. Sometimes he was successful, more often he failed, but always when he would accept it, the kindly bush settlers gave him freely of their best. Then, as basking in the warmth and brightness, he fished out from his pocket a few cents' worth of crackers, his face relaxed, for the love of wild nature was born in him, and the glorious freshness of the spring was free to the poorest as well as the rich. He ate the crackers with relish, wishing there had been more of them, stooped to drink at a glacier-fed rill, and then producing a corn-cob pipe, sighed on finding that only the tin label remained of his cake of tobacco.

Meanwhile as it happened, two young women, very dissimilar in face and bearing, strolling, unseen themselves, through the shadow of the firs, regarded him with some curiosity. The man looked worn and weary, his jean jacket was old and torn, and an essential portion of one boot was missing. His face had been almost blackened by the snow-reflected glare of the clear winter sun, and yet both decided that he was hardly a representative specimen of the



## Geoffrey's First Contract

wandering fraternity whose members, despising manual labour, travel, when possible, gratis, inside railway freight cars, at other times underneath them, and obtain a living by mysterious means.

Helen Savine was slender, tall, and dark in colour of eyes and hair, and though arrayed in a very plain dress of light fabric, carried herself with a dignity befitting the daughter of the famous engineering contractor Julius Savine, and one descended, through her mother, from Seigneurs of ancient French descent who had ruled in patriarchal fashion in old-world Quebec. Jean Graham, whose father owned the ranch on the slope behind them, was ruddy in face, with a solidity of frame that betokened Caledonian extraction, and true trans-Atlantic directness of speech. Savine was interested in various industrial enterprises recently inaugurated in that district, and his daughter had gone with him, as a change from seaboard cities, to Graham's ranch.

"He might be hungry," said Jean. "Quite good-looking, too, and it's quaint he sits there munching them crackers, instead of walking straight up and striking us for a meal. I don't like to see a good-looking man hungry," she added, reflectively.

"We will go down and speak to him," said Helen, and the suggestion that she should interview a wandering vagrant did not seem very out of place in that country where men from many different walks of life turned their often ill-fitted hands to the rudest labour that promised them a livelihood. In any case, Helen possessed a somewhat imperious will besides a grace of manner which made whatever she did seem seemly.

The result was that Geoffrey, looking round at the sound of approaching steps, stood suddenly upright, thrusting the most dilapidated boot behind the other, and wondering with what purpose the fair strangers had sought him. One he recognised as a type common enough throughout the Dominion—kindly, shrewd, somewhat hard-featured and caustic in

## His Master Purpose

speech ; but the other, who looked down on him with thinly-veiled pity, more resembled women of birth and education he had seen in England.

"You are a stranger to this district. Looking for work, perhaps?" said Helen Savine ; and Geoffrey lifted his wide and battered felt hat as he answered, "I am."

"There is work here," said Helen. "I can offer you a dollar now—if you would care to earn it. Yonder rock, which I believe is a loose boulder, cumpers our waggon trail, and if you are willing to remove it and will follow us to the ranch, you will find suitable tools."

Geoffrey flushed a little under his tan. He had grown used to being sworn at by foremen with Protectionist tendencies when seeking work, but it galled him to be offered a woman's charity, and the words "If you would care to earn it," left a sting. Nevertheless, he reflected that any superfluous sensitiveness would be distinctly out of place in one of his position, and, considering the wages paid in that country, the man who rolled the boulder clear, would well earn his dollar. Accordingly he answered, "I should be glad to do so, and will follow you."

The two women turned back towards the ranch, and Thurstan followed respectfully, as far as possible in the rear, that they might not observe the condition of his attire. This was an entirely superfluous precaution, and he should have known better, for Helen's keen eyes had noticed that and several other points already. Reaching the ranch, he possessed himself of a grub-hoe, which is a pick with an adze-shaped blade, beside an axe and shovel, and returned with them to the boulder. For an hour or two he toiled hard, grubbing out hundredweights of soil and gravel from round about it, then cutting a young fir inserted the butt of it as a lever, and spent another thirty minutes exerting his full strength on the opposite end. The rock, however, refused to move an inch, and because a few crackers are not much for



## Geoffrey's First Contract

a hungry man to work on after an all-night march, Thurstan became conscious that he had a headache and a distressful stitch in his side. Still, being obstinate and filled with an unreasoning desire to prove his trustworthiness to his fair employer, he continued doggedly, and after another hour's digging found the stone still immovable. Then it happened that while, with the perspiration dripping from him, he tugged at the lever, the rancher who had refused his offer that morning, riding up the trail, drew rein close beside.

"Hello! What are you after now? You're messing all this trail up if you're doing nothing else," he said.

"If you have come here to amuse yourself at my expense, take care. I'm not in the mood for baiting," said Thurstan, who still smarted under the recollection of the summary manner in which the speaker had rejected his proffered services. "There are, however, folks in this country more willing to give a stranger a chance than you, and I've taken a contract to remove that rock for a dollar. Now, if you are satisfied, ride on your way."

"Then you've made a blame bad bargain," said the Colonial, with unruffled good humour. "I was figuring I might help you. Thought you were a hobo after my chickens, or trying to bluff me into a free meal this morning. If you'd asked straight for it, I'd have given it you."

Geoffrey hesitated, divided between an inclination to laugh and assault the rancher, who perhaps guessed his thoughts, for, dismounting, he said, "If you're so mighty thin-skinned what are you doing here? Why don't you British dukes stop right back in your own country where folks touch their hats to you? Let me on to that lever."

For at least twenty minutes, the pair tugged and panted. Then rancher Bransome said, "The blame thing's either part of the out-crop or wedged fast there for ever, and I've no more time to spare. Say,

## His Master Purpose

Graham's a hard man, and has been playing it low on you. What's the matter with turning his contract up and going over to fill oat bags for me?"

"Thanks, but having given my word to move that rock, I'm going to stay here until I do it," said Geoffrey; and Bransome, nodding to him, rode on towards the ranch.

When he reached it he said to Jean Graham in the hearing of Miss Savine, "The old man has taken yonder guileless stranger in. He's put two good dollars' worth of work into that job already, and the rock's rather faster than it was before."

"Did he say Mr Graham hired him?" asked Helen, and drew her own inference when Bransome answered,—

"Why, no! I put it that way, and he didn't contradict me."

It was afternoon when Thurstan realised at last that even considerable faith in one's self is not sufficient unaided to move huge boulders. He felt faint and hungry, but the pride of the Insular Briton restrained him from begging for a meal. His own dislike to own defeat also prompted him to decide that where weary muscles failed, mechanical power might succeed, and he determined to tramp back a league to the settlement in the hope of perhaps obtaining a drill and some giant powder on credit. He had not studied mining theoretically as well as in a costly practical school for nothing. It was a rough trail to the settlement, the red dust lay thick upon it, and the afternoon sun was hot, while, when at last, powdered all over and very weary, Thurstan came in sight of the little wooden store, he saw Bransome's horse fastened outside it. He did not see the rancher, because that worthy sat on an empty box behind a sugar hogshead inside the counter.

"I want two sticks of giant powder, a fathom or two of fuse, and several detonators," said Geoffrey as indifferently as he could. "I have only two bits at present to pay for them, but if they don't come to



## Geoffrey's First Contract

more than a dollar you shall have the rest to-morrow I also want to borrow a drill."

The storekeeper was used to giving very much longer credit, but the glance he cast at the applicant was not reassuring, and it is possible he might have refused his request, but that, unseen by Thurstan, Bransome signalled to him from behind the barrel.

"We don't trade that way with strangers generally," he said. "Still, if you want them special, and will pay me what they're worth to-morrow, I'll oblige you, and even lend you a set of drills. But you'll come back sure, and not lose any of them drills?" he added dubiously.

"I haven't come here to rob you. It's a business deal, and not a favour I'm asking," said Geoffrey grimly, and when he withdrew the storekeeper commented,—

"Why can't you do your own charity, Bransome, instead of taxing me? That's the crank who wanted to run your lake down, isn't he? I guess I'll never see either him or them drills again."

"You will," said the rancher. "If that man's alive to-morrow you'll get your money; I'll go bail for him. He's just the man you mention, but I'm considerably less sure about the crankness that I was this morning. There's a quantity of fine clean sand in him."

Meanwhile, and soon after the time Geoffrey set out for the store, the two girls strolled down the trail to ascertain how he was progressing, and looked at each other significantly when they came upon the litter of débris and tools.

"Lit out!" said Miss Jean Graham. "The sight of all that work was too much for him. He'll be lying on his back now by the river thinking poetry. This country's just thick with reposeful Britishers nobody at home has any use for, and their kind friends ship off unto us. In a way I'm sorry. He lit out hungry, and didn't look that kind."

"I'm afraid we were a little hard upon him," said



## His Master Purpose

Helen, smiling. "Still, I am somewhat surprised he did not carry out his bargain."

"You can never trust them gilt-edge Britishers," said Jean Graham with authority. "There was old man Peters took one of them in, and he'd sit in the store to nights making little songs to his banjo, and talking just wonderful. Said he was a baronet or something if he had his rights, and made love to Sally. Old fool Peters believed him, and so did some of the rest, lent him three hundred dollars to start a lawsuit over his English property with. Dessay Peters thought red-haired Sally would look well trailing round a countess in a gold-hemmed dress. The baronet took the dollars, but wanted some more, and lit out the same night with Lou of the Sapin Rouge saloon."

"I should hardly expect all that from our acquaintance of this morning, but I am disappointed, though I'm sure I don't know why I should be," said Helen Savine.

The sunlight had faded from the valley, though the peaks still shimmered orange and red, and the broken edge of a glacier flashed like a great rose diamond, when the two girls sat on the verandah encircling Graham's ranch. That worthy and his stalwart sons were away rounding up his cattle, but Jean expected both them and her mother shortly, and the delayed supper was ready. The evening was very still and cool. The life-giving air was heavy with the breath of dew-touched cedars, while the hoarse clamour of the river accentuated the hush of the mountain solitude. Strange to say, both of the pair were thinking about the vagrant, and Helen Savine, who considered herself a judge of character, had been more impressed by him than she would have cared to admit. There was no doubt, she reflected, the man was, if by no means handsome, tolerably good-looking, and had enjoyed some training, though perhaps not the best, in England. He had also known adversity, which she deduced from



## Geoffrey's First Contract

the gauntness of his face and a certain grimness of expression, while mouth and chin indicated a masterful disposition. She was therefore the more surprised that he had allowed himself to be vanquished by the boulder.

Suddenly a heavy crash broke through the musical jangle of cow bells that drew nearer up the valley, and a cloud of yellow smoke curling above the dark branches spread itself across the fir tops in filmy folds.

"I guess that's our hobo blowing the rock up," said Jean. "I wonder where he stole the giant powder from. Well, daddy's found his cattle, and the swearing will have made him hungry. I'll start Kate on to the supper, and we'll bring the hobo in when he comes round for his dollar."

Presently Thurstan knocked at the door, and strode in at a summons to enter. He halted inside the threshold slightly abashed, holding his hat in hand, for Jean, looking ruddy and winsome in light print dress, with sleeves rolled clear of each plump fore-arm, was spreading great platefuls of hot cakes and desiccated fruits among the more solid viands on the snowy tablecloth. Geoffrey found it difficult to refrain from glancing at the good things wolfishly, until his eyes rested upon Miss Savine, and then it cost him an effort to turn them away. Helen reclined in an ox-hide lounge; an early red rose set, perhaps, because there was Latin blood in her veins, among the glossy clusters of her thick, dark hair. A faint tinge of crimson showed through the pale olive in her cheek, and he caught the glimmer of pearly teeth between the ripe red lips, while now her form, which had lost the dignity that struck him when she stood upright, became only graceful. He grew painfully conscious in her presence that he was ragged, toil-stained and dusty, though he had made the best toilet he could beside a stream.

"I have removed the rock, and brought the tools back," he said.

## His Master Purpose

"How much did the explosives cost you?" asked Helen, and Geoffrey smiled.

"If you will excuse me, is not that beside the question? I engaged to remove the boulder, and I have done it," he said.

Helen ruled her widowed father and most of the men she came into contact with. Very few of her wishes had ever been thwarted, and she was conscious of a faint displeasure that this dishevelled wanderer should even respectfully slight her question. So, placing two broad silver coins on the table, she answered coldly, "Then here are your covenanted wages, and we are obliged to you."

Geoffrey handed one of the coins back with a slight inclination of his head. "Our bargain was one dollar, madam, and I cannot take more. Perhaps you have forgotten," he said.

Helen was conscious of distinct annoyance now. The colour grew a little warmer in her cheek and her eyes brighter, but she only said, "Thank you," and took up the piece of silver. Then Jean Graham, prompted by the Westener's generous hospitality, and a feeling that she had been overlooked, broke in,—

"You have earned a square meal any way, and you're going to get it. Sit right down there and we'll have supper when the boys come in."

Thurstan cast a swift hungry glance at the viands, uneasily conscious that Helen was watching him. Then, remembering his frayed and tattered garments and the hole in his boot, he answered, "I thank you, but as I must be well on my way to-morrow I cannot stay."

"Then you'll take these along, and eat them when it suits you," said the girl, deftly thrusting a plateful of hot cakes upon him, and Geoffrey stood, divided between gratitude and annoyance, stupidly still, holding out the dainties at arm's length, while flavoured syrup dripped from them. It was equally impossible to return them without flagrant discourtesy or retire with any dignity. Finally he moved out

## Geoffrey's First Contract

backwards still clutching the cakes, and when he disappeared Helen laughed softly, while Jean's merriment rang out peal after peal.

"You saved the situation," said the former at length. "It was really getting embarrassing, and he made me ashamed. I ought to have known better than play that trick with the dollar, but the poor man looked as if he needed it. He is certainly not a hobo, and I could wonder who he is, but that it does not matter, as we shall never see him again."

In this, however, Miss Savine was wrong, for she was destined to see a good deal of Geoffrey Thurstan in the future. Meantime, the latter walked savagely down the trail feeling greatly tempted to hurl the cakes away, but finally thought better of it and ate them instead. It was a trifling action, but it led to important results as trifles often do, because if he had not done so he would have limped back through the settlement towards the railroad and probably never re-entered that valley. As it was, when the edge of his hunger was blunted he felt drowsy, and curling himself up among the roots of a hemlock, sank into slumber under the open sky, which was no great hardship at that season. Early next morning Bransome, who met and stopped him, said,—

"I've been thinking over what you told me about making a rock cutting to run the water clear of my meadows, and if you're still keen on business I'm open to talk to you."

"Why didn't you talk yesterday morning?" asked Thurstan, and the rancher answered frankly, "Well, just then I had my doubts about you; now I figure that if you say you can do a thing, you can. Come over to the ranch, and if we can't make a deal I'll give you a week's work, any way."

"Thanks!" said Thurstan. "I should be glad to, but I have some business at the settlement first. Will you advance me a dollar on account of wages to discharge a debt to the storekeeper with?"



## His Master Purpose

"Why, yes!" said the rancher. "But didn't you get a dollar from Graham yesterday? Do you want two?"

"Yes!" said Thurstan. "I want two," and Bransome laughed.

"You're in a greater hurry to pay your debts than other folks from your country I've met over here," he said. "But come on to the ranch and breakfast; I'll square the storekeeper for you."

Thurstan did so, and refrained from explaining that perhaps, from some faint trace of superstition in his composition, he intended to keep Helen Savine's dollar. This was the first coin he had earned as his own master in the Dominion, and he felt that the successfully-executed contract marked a turning point in his career.

## CHAPTER IV

### GEOFFREY MAKES PROGRESS

THURSTAN did justice to his breakfast at Bransome's ranch, and in explanation frankly informed his host that a man cannot exist very long on two handfuls of crackers and one of hot corn cakes, while when the meal was finished and pipes were lighted, the pair surveyed each other with mutual interest. They were not unlike in character and physique, for the Colonial, though fair in complexion, was also, as usual with his kind, lean and wiry. His quick, restless movements suggested nervous energy, but he could, when advisable, assume the bovine stolidity which, though foreign to his real nature, the Canadian bushman occasionally adopts for diplomatic purposes. Thurstan, however, as yet retained certain traits of the Insular Briton, including a curtness of speech and judicious reserve.

"That blame lake backs up on my meadows each time the creek rises," Bransome observed at length. "The snow melts fast in hay time, and more often than I like a freshet harvests my timothy grass for me. Now cutting down three-hundred-foot redwoods is good as exercise, but it gets monotonous, and a big strip of natural prairie would be considerably more useful than a beaver's swimming bath. You said you could blow a channel through the rocks that hold up the outlet?"

"I can!" said Geoffrey. "From some knowledge of mining I am inclined to think that a series of heavy charges fired simultaneously along the natural

## His Master Purpose

cleavage would reduce the lake's level at least a fathom. Have you got a pencil?"

Here it was that the national idiosyncrasies of the men became apparent, for Thurstan, leaning on one elbow, made an elaborate sketch and calculations with Bransome's pencil. A humming-bird, resplendent in gold and purple, blundered in between the roses shrouding the open window, and hovered for a moment above him on invisible wings. Thurstan did not notice the bird, but Bransome flung a crust at it as he smiled on his companion.

"We'll take the figures for granted. Life is too short to worry over them," he said. "Let's get down to business. How much are you asking, no cure no pay, I finding tools and material? I want your bottom price straight away."

Thurstan had never done business in so summary a fashion before, but he could adapt himself to circumstances, and named a moderate sum forthwith.

"Can't come down?—then it's a deal!" said the rancher. "Contract—this is the Pacific slope, and we've no time for such foolery. I'm figuring I can trust you, and my word's good enough in this locality. Run that pond down a fathom and you'll get your money. Any particular reason why you shouldn't start in to-day? Don't know of any? Then put that pipe in your pocket, and we'll strike out for the store at the settlement now."

So it came about that at sunset Geoffrey was deposited with several bags of provisions, a blanket, and a litter of tools, outside a ruined shack on the edge of the natural prairie surrounding Bransome's lake. He had elected to live beside his work. Tall forest of tremendous growth walled it round, and then for a space rotting trees and willow swale showed where the intermittent rise of waters had set a limit to the all-encroaching bush. The wail of a loon rang eerily out of the shadow, and was answered by the howl of a distant wolf. A thin silver crescent sailed clear of the fretted minarets of towering firs



## Geoffrey Makes Progress

clear cut against a pale pearl shimmering, and a cold breeze sighed about the deserted dwelling. It was crumbling fast, and a maple, which grew inside it, had wrenched off the shingle roof.

"Carlton's prairie, we call it," said Bransome, leaning against his light waggon. "Land which isn't all rock or forest is mighty scarce, and Carlton figured he'd done great things when he bought this place. Five years he tried to drain it, working night and day, and pouring good dollars in, and five times the freshets washed out his crops for him. The creek just laughed at his ditches. Then when he'd no more money he lit out to help track-laying, and a big tree flattened him. The boys said he didn't seem very sorry. This prairie had broken his heart for him, and I've heard the Siwah say he still comes back and digs at nights when the moon is full."

"Carlton made a mistake," said Geoffrey, who had been examining the surroundings rather than listening to the tale. "He began in what looked the easiest and was the hardest way. He should have cut the mother rock instead of trenching the forest." When Bransome drove away he rolled himself in the thick brown blanket, and sank into slumber under the lee of the dead man's dwelling.

An owl that circled above it, stooped now and then to inspect him on muffled wing. Once a stealthy panther, slipping through the willows, bared its fangs and passed the other way, and the pale green points of luminescence that twinkled in the surrounding bush, and were the eyes of timber wolves, faded again. Neither did the deer they sought come down to feed on the swamp that night, for a man, holding dominion over the beasts of the forest, lay asleep in the desolate clearing.

Geoffrey commenced work early next day, and afterwards week by week toiled from dawn until nearly sunset blasting clear minor reefs and ledges until he attacked the mother rock under the lip of a splashing fall. The fee promised was by no means



## His Master Purpose

large, and because current wages prohibited assistance he did everything himself. So he shovelled débris and drilled holes in the hard blue grit; and drilling single-handed is a difficult operation, damaging to the knuckles of the man attempting it. Also he waded waist-deep in water, learning to carry heavy burdens on his shoulder, and found his interest in the task growing upon him. He felt that much depended upon its successful completion. It was not, however, all monotonous labour, and there were compensations, when, after each day's toil was done, he lay prone on scented pine twigs, and heard the voices of the bush break softly through the solemn hush as, through gradations of fading glories along the lofty snows, night closed in. He would watch the black bear grubbing hog-fashion among the tall wild cabbage, and the little butter duck, paddling before its brood, set divergent lines creeping across the steely lake until the shadows of the whitened driftwood broke and quivered.

Sometimes he would call the chipmunks which scurried up and down behind him, or tap on a rotten log until a crested woodpecker cried in answer, and by degrees the spell of the mountains gained upon him, until he forgot his troubles and became no more subject to fits of berserk rage. He was growing quiet and more patient, learning to wait, but his energy and determination still remained. Neither was he wholly cut off from human intercourse, for at times some of the scattered ranchers would ride over to offer impracticable advice or predict his failure, and Geoffrey listened quietly, answering only that who was right would be made clear in time. Also on occasion he tramped through scented shadow to Graham's homestead and discussed crops and cattle with the rancher, besides other topics with Helen Savine, who, perhaps, finding no person of liberal education thereabouts, seemed pleased to talk to him. There was nothing incongruous in this, for petty class distinctions vanish in the bush, where,



## Geoffrey Makes Progress

when his daily task is done, the hired man meets his master on terms of equality.

At last the day on which his work was to be practically tested arrived, and most of the ranchers drove over to witness what they regarded as a reckless experiment. Graham went with his company, and Jean and Helen Savine stood a little apart from the rest on the edge of the forest looking down on the glancing water and talking with the experimenter. The rich wet meadows were heavy with flag and blossom to the edge of the driftwood frieze, and the splash of rising trout alone disturbed the reflection of the mighty trunks and branches crowning a promontory on the farther side.

"It is very beautiful, and now you are going to spoil it all, Mr Bransome," said Helen.

The rancher glanced at her with admiration in his eyes. Helen was worth inspection, and her thin summer dress, with the cluster of crimson roses tucked into the waist of it, became her curiously. The sombre cedars behind it enhanced the symmetry of the shapely figure, draped in pale-tinted clinging fabric, and the glowing sun had called a tinge of warmth into the usually somewhat too cold face.

"Yes, it's mighty pretty ; a picture worth looking at—all of it," he said, and there was a faint smile in Helen's eyes as she recognised that this was as far as Bransome dare venture in the direction of a compliment. He was not a diffident person, but he felt a wholesome respect for Helen Savine.

"Mighty pretty, but what's the good of it, and I'm not farming for my health," he continued. "It's just a beautiful wilderness, and what has a man brains given him for unless it's to turn the wilderness into cheese and butter. It broke one man's heart already, and my thick-headed neighbours said a swamp it would stop for ever, but a stranger with ideas to him came along, says he can cut that outlet, and I told him, 'Sail ahead.'"

"I did hear you told him not to be a—perhaps I

## His Master Purpose

had better say a simple fool," Helen answered mischievously; and Bransome coughed before he made reply,—

"May be! I didn't know him then, but to-day I'm open to back that man heavy to put through just whatever he sets his mind upon."

The subject of this encomium came up from the little gorge by the lake outlet as he spoke, and it struck Helen Savine that the rock worker had changed to advantage since she first saw him. His keen eyes, which she had noticed were quick to flash with anger, had grown more kindly, the bronzed face more reposeful, while the thin jean garments and great knee boots, which had no longer any rents in them, suited the well-proportioned frame, that seemed replete with vigour. She even felt curious as to how it would stand the test of evening dress.

"I was disappointed about the electric firing gear ordered from Vancouver, but I think the coupled time fuses should serve almost as well," said Thurstan, with a bow to Helen, for which Bransome envied him. "You appear interested, Miss Savine. We are trusting to the shock of a number of charges fired simultaneously, and perhaps you had better retire nearer the bush, for the blast will be powerful. I should like your good wishes, since you are in a measure responsible for this venture. You will remember you gave me my first commission."

"You have them!" said Helen, with a frank sincerity, for though the man was a mere enterprising labourer, she was too proud to assume any air of condescension. She was Helen Savine, and considered she had no need to maintain her dignity.

Geoffrey returned some conventional answer, and there was a buzz of voices as he and Bransome walked back together towards the gorge, though the rancher halted discreetly when his companion, taking a brand from a fire near it, clambered over the boulders. The latter disappeared among them, and the voices grew louder when he came into view again walking

## Geoffrey Makes Progress

hurriedly, while several trails of thin blue vapour commenced to crawl in and out among the stones. Bransome joined him, and the pair broke into a smart trot heading for the bush until Geoffrey, halting near it, ran at full speed towards the gorge again to the astonishment of all who watched him. They were already bracing themselves to face the heavy shock.

"He's mad—stark mad!" roared Graham. "Come back for your life, Bransome. It's smashed into small pieces both of you will be," and the eyes of the spectators grew wide as they riveted them upon the two running figures, for the rancher had also turned, and the lines of vapour creeping with ominous swiftness across the face of the stone.

Then there was a roar as the rearmost man clutched at the other, missed him, and staggered several paces leaving his hat behind him before he took up the chase again, while single disjointed cries sharper than the rest rose out of the clamour, "Blown to glory both of them! Two sticks of giant powder in most of the holes. All that's left of the Britisher won't be worth picking up!"

The two men disappeared among the boulders almost under the white foam of the fall, and for a brief space there was heavy silence emphasised by the song of hurrying water and the drumming of a blue-grouse on the summit of a fir. Helen Savine fancied she could hear the assembly breathing unevenly, and felt a pricking among the roots of her hair, while she struggled with an impulse which prompted her to cry aloud or in any extravagant fashion break the torturing suspense. Jean Graham, whose own eyes were wide with apprehension, noted that her face was bloodless to the lips. Neither had as yet been rudely confronted with tragedy, and both felt held fast, spell-bound, without the power to move.

"The Lord have mercy on them," said the hoarse voice of a man somewhere behind the pair.

Once more a murmur swelled into a roar, and Jean,

## His Master Purpose

twining her brown fingers together, cried, "There! They're coming. They may be in time!"

A figure, apparently Bransome's, leapt down from a boulder close in front of one that climbed over the stone, and there followed harsh, breathless cries of encouragement as the two headed at mad speed for the sheltering forest, the rearmost runner, who came up with hands clenched and long swinging strides, gaining steadily on the one before him. They were near enough for those who watched to see that the fear of sudden death was stamped upon their perspiring faces. Then as they passed a spur of rock outcrop Thurstan leapt upon the leader, hurled him forward so that he lost his balance and the pair went down out of sight among the rocks, while a shaft of radiance pale in the sunlight blazed aloft beside the outlet of the lake. Thick yellow-tinted vapour followed it, and hillside and forest rang to the shock of a stunning detonation.

The smoke curling in filmy wreaths spread itself across the quaggy meadows, while the patter of falling fragments filled the quivering bush, and was mingled with a loud splashing, or a heavy crash as some piece of greater weight drove hurtling through the trees or plunged into the lake. Then for the last time the assembly gave voice, raising a tumultuous cheer of relief as the two men came forth uninjured out of the eddying smoke.

It was about that time when Geoffrey, shaking the dust from his garments, said with a somewhat nervous laugh, "We cut it rather fine, but I felt reasonably sure there would be just sufficient time, and it might have spoiled the whole blast if the two bad fuses had failed to fire their shots. Of course, I'm grateful for your company, but as it was my particular business I don't quite see why you turned back after me."

Bransome, who mopped his forehead, stared at the speaker with some wonder and more admiration before he answered, "There's a good deal of cast-iron about you, and I guess I'd a long way sooner

## Geoffrey Makes Progress

have trusted the rest than have gone back to stir up those two charges. What took me?—well, I figured you had turned suddenly crazy, and I was in a way responsible for you. Made the best bargain for your time I could, but I didn't buy you up bones and body—see?"

"I think I do," said Geoffrey, and that was all, but it meant the recognition of a bond between them, while Bransome, as if glad to change the subject, asked, "Say, after you had fired the fuse what did you waste precious seconds looking for? If I wasn't too scared to notice anything clearly I'd swear you found something and picked it up."

"I did!" said Geoffrey, smiling. "It was something I must have dropped before. Only a trifle, but I would not like to lose it, and—I had one eye on the fuses—there seemed a second or two to spare. However, for some reason my throat feels all stuck together. Have you any cider in your waggon?"

It was half-an-hour later when most of the spectators stood watching the released waters thunder down the gorge, for the blast had been successful, that Helen Savine said,—

"I don't quite understand what happened, Mr Bransome."

"It was this way!" answered the rancher, glad to profit by any opportunity of interesting the fair questioner. "That Thurstan is a hard, tough man. Two fuses that were to fire small charges petered out, and sooner than risk anything he must light them again. I don't quite understand all the rest of it, either, for he's not a mean man, and why he should stay fooling on top of a powder mine looking for one dollar when I've a hatful to pay him is away beyond me. Yet I'm sure he picked up a piece of silver just before we ran. Curious kind of creature, isn't he?"

Helen thought the incident distinctly curious. She also failed to comprehend why a man who had many to receive should risk his life for the sake of one silver coin, but she could find no solution of the

## His Master Purpose

mystery until it was explained that evening. Geoffrey Thurstan tramped over to Graham's ranch attired in white shirt, black sash, and new store clothes, and by degrees he and Miss Savine gravitated away from the others, as had happened before. They were interested in subjects that did not appeal to the rest, and though Jean smiled mischievously at times, this excited no comment. Clear moonlight sparkled upon the untrodden snows above them, snows that had remained stainless since the giant peaks were framed when the world was young. The pines were black on their lower slopes, and white mists filled the valley, out of which the song of the river rose in long reverberations. The pair leaned on the verandah balustrade, both silent, though half-heard voices reached them through the open window of the room hard by, for the solemnity of the mountains impressed them, and speech seemed superfluous.

At last Geoffrey, in reply to a question respecting his adventures that day, said quietly, "There was really no great risk, and if there had been the results would have justified it. The failure of two charges might have spoiled all my work for me. Since I left you the Roads and Trails Surveyor voluntarily offered me a rock work contract he had refused before, and I at once accepted it."

"You have not been used to this laborious life. Have you no further ambition, and do you like it?" asked Helen, flashing a quick glance at him, and Geoffrey's eyes twinkled.

"It is not exactly what I expected, but as there appears to be no great demand in this country for mental abilities, one is glad to earn a living as one can," he said. "I am afraid I am a somewhat ambitious person, and only consider this the beginning, and Miss Savine responsible for it. You will remember who it was offered me my first contract."

"Don't!" said Helen, averting her eyes. "That is hardly fair or civil. You really looked so—and how was I to know?"

## Geoffrey Makes Progress

Geoffrey's pulse beat faster, and the smile faded out of his eyes as he noticed, for the moon was high, the trace of faintly heightened colour in the speaker's face.

"I doubtless looked the hungry, worn-out tramp I was," he interposed gravely. "And out of gentle compassion, you offered me a dollar. Well, I earned that dollar, and I have it still. It has brought me good luck, and I will keep it as a talisman."

Instinctively his fingers slid to one end of a thin gold chain, and for a moment a look of consternation came into his face, for the links hung loose; then it relaxed as the hard hand dropped to his pocket, and Helen found it judicious to watch a grey blur of shadow moving across the snow. She had sometimes wondered what he wore at one end of that cross-pattern chain, for rock cutters do not usually adorn themselves with such trinkets, but, remembering Bransome's comments, she now understood what had happened just before the explosion. Geoffrey's quick eyes had noticed something unusual in her air, and his old reckless spirit, breaking through all restraint, prompted him to say,—

"It will, I fancy, still bring me good fortune. I come of a superstitious race, and nothing would tempt me to part with it. This, as I said, is only the beginning. It appeared impossible to move the boulder from your waggon trail, and I did it. This neighbours declared nobody could drain Bransome's prairie, and a number of goodly acres are drying now, while to-night I feel it may be possible to go on and on, until—"

"Does not that sound somewhat egotistical?" interposed Helen.

"Horribly," said Thurstan, with a curious smile. "But you see I am trusting in the talisman, and some day I may ask you to admit that I have made it good. Dollars!—I'm not avaricious, and desire them only as means to an end, while, if all goes well, the contract for the waggon road rock work should bring me in a good many of them."



## His Master Purpose

"You are refreshingly certain," said Helen. "But will the end or dominant purpose justify all this?" and Thurstan answered quietly,—

"I may ask you to judge that also some day!"

Helen was conscious of a chagrin quite unusual to her. Hitherto she had experienced little difficulty in making any of the men she met regret anything that resembled presumption, but with this one it was different. What he meant she would not at the moment ask herself, but though she rather admired his quietly confident tone, it also nettled her, and yet without begging an awkward question she could not resent it. Geoffrey's reckless frankness was often more unassailable than wiser men's diplomacy—and she was certainly pleased he had recovered the dollar.

"The dew is getting heavy, and I promised Jean some instruction in netting," she answered. "Isn't it useless to forecast the future? We must go in."

## CHAPTER V

### THE LEGENDS OF CROSBIE GHYLL

HELEN SAVINE had spent two years in England, and because her father was a prosperous man who humoured her slightest wishes, occasionally returned to take her pleasure in what, though Canadian born, she called the Old Country. It is a far cry from the snowy heights of the Pacific slope to the pleasant valleys of the North Country, but in these days of quadruple-expansion engines, distance counts but little when one has sufficient money, and the presence of Miss Savine in one of the latter was accounted for quite naturally. The Atlantic express brought her and her aunt by marriage, Mrs Thomas P. Savine, into Montreal, whence a fast train conveyed them to New York in time to catch a big Southampton liner, but Mrs Savine was a restless lady, and had grown tired of London within six weeks from the day she left Vancouver city. She was an American, and took pains to impress the fact upon anybody who mistook her for a Canadian, and finding a party of her countrymen and women, whom she had hoped to overtake in the metropolis, had departed northwards, determined to follow them to the English lakes.

"It's a big, hot, dusty wilderness, Tom, and we've seen all they've got to show us here before," she said to her long-suffering husband, as she stood balancing a gorgeous parasol in the hotel vestibule. "Say, we'll pull out to-day and catch the Schroeders' party meditating round Wordsworth's tomb. Young man, will you kindly get us a railroad schedule?"

## His Master Purpose

The silver-buttoned official who kept the big plate-glass door started at a smart rap on his shoulder, and blinked at the angular lady in somewhat alarming costume and blue veil, while Thomas Savine interposed meekly,—

"A time-table; and that's evidently not the man to ask, my dear."

"Then he can tell the right one," his wife answered airily, and presently halted before a row of resplendently-gilded books adorning one portion of the vestibule. She thereupon explained for the benefit of all listeners that it was hard to see the necessity for so many railways in so small a country, and finally, with a clerk's assistance, selected a train which would deposit her at Oxenholme, from which place the official suggested she might find means of transport into the district in which, to the best of his belief, Coleridge and Wordsworth, or one of them, wrote what Mrs Savine entitled his little pieces. It proved good counsel, and two of the party spent a delightful week at Ambleside, which was only marred by Mrs Savine's laments that potatoes were not served at supper and breakfast. In her own western country the menu of each of the three daily meals is the same, and, perhaps because they were not there, her soul longed for the customary tubers, until at last one morning the crisis came.

"I want some potatoes with my ham," she said; and when the attendant explained that the vegetables were never eaten in England at that meal, inquired, "Don't you grow potatoes anywhere in this country?"

The attendant stated that very fine ones were produced in the immediate vicinity, and Mrs Savine waved a jewelled hand majestically,—

"Then away you go and buy some. I'll sit right here until they're boiled," she said.

"It really isn't the custom, and you know you never got them in London, and hardly ate them at home,"



## The Legends of Crosbie Ghyll

said Thomas Savine, but his spouse remained superior to such reasoning.

"That's quite outside the question. I want those potatoes, and I'm going to have them," she said.

There was a whispering at the end of the breakfast hall, somebody whistled up a tube, and the hotel manager appeared to state, with regrets, that it was unfortunately impossible in the busy season to upset the culinary arrangements for the benefit of a single guest.

"Then we'll start again and follow the Schrøeders' trail to that place in Cumberland," said Mrs Savine. "Tom, you go out and buy one of those twenty-five cent guide-books which tell you all about everything. Hire some ponies and a man, and we'll drive a straight line across the mountains."

The manager respectfully suggested it would be better to take the train, even though the latter went round, because the mountains were lofty, and roads indifferent in the region they must traverse, to which the lady answered with some truth that the highest peak in Britain was a pigmy to the lowest of the Selkirks, and that she had spent two summers camping among the fastnesses of the snow-clad Olympians.

"Your aunt is a smart woman, but she can't help upsetting things," said Thomas Savine, when his niece went out with him to make arrangements, and Helen smiled pleasantly, for she knew her aunt's good qualities, and was also fond of adventurous wanderings. It was perfect weather, and the trio enjoyed their somewhat eccentric journey among the less frequented fells, during which they camped, so Thomas Savine termed it, each night in some high-perched hostelry or trout fisher's haunt, while Helen realised that never before had she fully appreciated the beauty of England. Quite apart from its wonders of industrial enterprise, tide of world-wide commerce, and treasury of literature and art, the old country was to be loved for its quiet, green restfulness she thought.

## His Master Purpose

Then there came a change, for a south-wester drove thick rain-clouds scudding across peak and valley, and filled the passes with dank, white mists from the Irish Sea, and so, towards the close of a threatening day, Mrs Savine's party came winding down in a hurry from a bare hill shoulder and under the grey crags of Crosbie Fell. The hollows beneath them were lost in woolly vapour, low-flying scud raked the bare ridges above, and even as they passed a black rift in the hillside the first heavy drops fell pattering. Helen Savine had seen many a mining adit in British Columbia, and turning to glance at the mouth of the tunnel she read, scratched on the rock beside it, "Thurstan's Folly." That careless glance over her shoulder was to lead to important results.

"There's wild weather brewing," said Thomas Savine. "Make those ponies rustle, and we'll get in somewhere before it comes along."

When they reached the little wind-swept village, it, however, became evident that no shelter for the night could be found therein, for it was seldom that even an enterprising pedestrian tourist came down from the high moors behind Crosbie Fell. Still, one inhabitant informed their guide, in a tongue none of the others could comprehend, that if he was in an unusually good humour old Musker the keeper might take them in at Crosbie Ghyll. Thus it happened that just as the rain commenced in earnest such a cavalcade as had probably never before passed its gloomy portals rode up to the gate of the dilapidated edifice. Some of the iron-bound barrier still lay mouldering in the hollow of the arch, and Helen noticed slits for muskets in the stout walls above, for their owners had been a fighting race, and several times in bygone centuries the tide of battle had rolled about and ebbed away from the stubbornly-held stronghold. The observer had gathered so much from a paragraph in her guide-book.

The romance of English history appealed to her as

## The Legends of Crosbie Ghyll

It does to the citizens of the wider Britain over seas, and she turned in her saddle to look about her. Framed by the weather-worn archway she could see the black rampart of the fells fading into the rain, and the bare sweep of moss and moor, which had once stretched unbroken to the feet of the great ranges above the Solway shore. Inside the quadrangle, for the place had during the past century served as farm instead of hall, barn, cart shed and shippon were ruinous and empty, but she could fill the space in fancy with sturdy archer, man-at-arms, and corseleted rider, for that the present venerable edifice had been built into an older one the stump of a square tower remained to testify.

Thomas Savine pounded on the oaken door at one end of the courtyard until it was opened by a bent-shouldered man with frosted hair and wrinkled visage, in keeping with the spirit of the place.

"We are unfortunate strangers with a guide who has lost his way, and it would be a favour if you could take us in to-night out of the storm," he said, and the other man glanced at the party suspiciously.

"If you ride straight on across the moor you'll find a road, and a brand new hotel in twelve miles, where you'll get whatever you have been used to," he said. "I once took some London folks in, and after the thanks they gave me I never will again."

"We're not Londoners, only forlorn Canadians," said Thomas Savine. "Never mind, Matilda; he'll find out that you're an American in due time. We have all learned to rough it in our own country, and would trouble you very little."

"What part of Canada?" asked the forbidding figure in the doorway, and when Savile answered, "British Columbia," called "Margery!" and a little weazened woman, with cheeks still ruddy from much lashing of the wind, appeared in the portal.

"Strangers from British Columbia! Perhaps they know the master," said the man, and there was a

## His Master Purpose

whispering until the woman vanished, saying, "I'll ask Miss Gracie."

She returned promptly, and bade the party enter with a reserved courtesy, sent her husband and the guide to stable the ponies, and fifteen minutes later the trio reassembled beside the deep-seated window of a great stone-flagged room, darkly wainscoted, which had once apparently been the hall, and was now kitchen. But there was a spotless cloth and neat cutlery on the table by the window, a big tarn trout and bacon, hacked from the sides hanging beneath the smoke-blackened beams, frizzled upon a peat fire; and though she found neither wine nor potatoes, Mrs Savine said she had not enjoyed such a meal since she left Vancouver city.

"We can't give you a sitting-room to yourselves," said the withered dame as she removed the cloth. "What furniture there is above is covered up, and it will be ill finding you sleeping quarters even. Nobody lives here beside ourselves, except when Mr Forsyth comes down for a few weeks' shooting. His wife was a Thurstan, and he bought the old place to please her sooner than let it go quite out of the family."

"A Thurstan!" said Helen Savine. "We saw 'Thurstan's Folly' written beside a mining tunnel on the fell. Was that one of the former owners? Being Colonials we are interested in all ancient buildings and their traditions."

"Oh, yes!" broke in Mrs Savine. "We just love to hear about wicked barons and witches and all those quaint folk of the olden time."

Musker had drawn nearer meanwhile, and Thomas Savine held out the cigar case that lay upon his knee. "If we may smoke in the great hearth there, just help yourself," said he. "My wife is fond of antiquities, and if you have any to talk of, we should be glad of your company."

Musker glanced keenly at his guests. Though, having lived elsewhere, he spoke easy colloquial English, he was a son of the North Country,

## The Legends of Crosbie Ghyll

dogged and slow, intensely self-respecting, and, while loyal with a feudal fealty to superiors he knew, quick to resent a stranger's assumption of authority. But none of the visitors attempted this. Thomas Savine, brown-faced, vigorous, a pleasant Colonial gentleman, smiled upon him good-naturedly, and Musker took a cigar awkwardly. Mrs Savine surveyed the great bare hall with respectful curiosity and evident interest, while Helen leaned back in her chair, a winsome, dark beauty, and a picture even the keeper's dim eyes could find pleasure in, for the stains of travel had fallen from her, and few people had ever seen Miss Savine in disarray, visibly interested.

"He was," he said, answering the first question. "Maybe you met the master in British Columbia?"

"What is his full name, and what is he like?" asked Helen, bending forward a little; and the woman, reaching over, lifted a faded photograph from the window seat.

"Geoffrey Thurstan!" she answered. "That was him when he was young. My husband yonder broke the pony in."

Helen started as she gazed at the picture of the boy and pony. The face was like, and yet unlike, that of the gaunt and hungry man she had first seen sitting upon the fallen fir. "Yes," she answered gravely; "I know him. I met Mr Thurstan in British Columbia."

"Then we would take it very kindly if you would tell us how and where you found him, miss," said Musker in haste.

"I found him in a great Canadian forest, looking very worn and tired," said Helen, with a trace of colour in her face. "I—I hired him to do some work for me, and it was hard work—much harder than I fancied—but he did it, and, as we afterwards discovered, spent all I paid him on the powder he found was necessary."

"Ay," said the old man. "That was Mr Geoffrey. They were all hard and ill to beat, the Thurstans of



## His Master Purpose

Crosbie. And you'll kindly tell us, miss, you saw him again?"

"Yes," repeated Helen, "I saw him again. By good fortune the work he did for me procured him a contract he carried out daringly, and when I last saw him he was no longer hungry or ragged, but I fancy on the way to win success as an engineer."

Musker straightened his bent shoulders and smiled a slow, almost reluctant smile of pride, while his wife's eyes were grateful as she fixed them on the speaker. "Ay! What Mr Geoffrey sets his heart on he'll win or ruin himself over. It was the way of all of them; and this is gradely news," he said.

"Now," said Helen, nodding towards him graciously, "we don't wish to be unduly inquisitive, but—if you may tell us—why did Mr Thurstan emigrate to Canada?"

Musker was evidently tempted to embark upon a favourite topic, and his wife went out hurriedly. But he hesitated, sitting silent for a minute or two, and there was an interruption while he did so, for Savine, rising under the arch of the great hearth, flung his cigar into the fire, as a young woman, wearing what Helen noticed was a decidedly antiquated riding habit, came forward out of the shadows.

"I hope we are not intruding here," said the Canadian. "We were tired out before the rain came down, and almost afraid to cross the moor."

"You are very welcome," said the stranger. "I am not, however, mistress, only a relative of the old place's owner, and therefore a kinswoman of Geoffrey Thurstan. I heard you had shown him a passing kindness, and should like to thank you."

There was no apparent reason why the two young women should scrutinise each other, and yet both did so by the fading daylight and red blaze of the fire. Helen saw that the stranger was ruddy and blonde, frank by nature and impulsive she also fancied, while the other noted only that the Colonial was pale and

## The Legends of Crosbie Ghyll

dark and comely, with a slightly, imperious presence, and a face it was not easy to read.

"I am Marian Thwaite of Barrow Hall, and regret I cannot stay any longer, having three miles to ride in the rain," she said. "Still, I may return to-morrow before you set out. Mrs Forsyth will be pleased if she hears you have made these Canadian strangers comfortable, Musker, and I think you may tell them why Mr Geoffrey left England. May I ask your names?"

Helen told her, and when, with an interchange of courtesies, Miss Thwaite departed, Musker commenced the story of Thurstan's Folly. It had grown quite dark, and driving rain lashed the windows, while the ancient building was filled with strange rumblings and the wailing of the blast when he concluded,—“Mr Geoffrey was too proud to turn a swindler, and that was why he shook off his sweetheart, who tried to persuade him, though he knew old Anthony Thurstan would have left him his money if they married.”

“Some said it was the opposite,” interposed his wife; but Musker answered angrily, “Then they didn't tell it right. No woman born could twist Geoffrey Thurstan from his path, and when she gave him bad counsel he turned his back on her. A fool these dolts called him. He was a leal, hard man, and what was a light woman's greediness to him?”

“And what became of the lady?” asked Helen, with a curious flash in her eyes.

“She married a London man who came here shooting, married him out of spite, and has rued it many times if the tales are true. She was down with him fishing, looking sour and pale, and the Hall maids were saying—”

“Just gossip and lies!” broke in his spouse; and Helen, who apparently lapsed into a disdainful indifference, asked no further questions. Mrs Savine did, however, and Musker, who became unusually

## His Master Purpose

communicative, presently offered to show the strangers what he called the armoury. They followed him down a draughty corridor to the black-wainscoted gun-room at the base of the crumbling tower, and when he had lighted a lamp its glow revealed a select, modern collection of costly guns, glistening like sardines with oil well rubbed in. There were also trout rods hung upon the wall, and a few good sporting etchings, at all of which Musker glanced somewhat contemptuously. "These are Mr Forsyth's, and I take care of them, but he only belongs to the place by purchase and marriage. Those belonged to the Thurstans—the old, dead Thurstans—and they hunted men," he said.

He ran the lamp up higher by a tarnished brass chain, and pointed first to a big mouldering bow. "A Thurstan drew that in France long ago, and it has splitted many an Annandale cattle thief in the Solway mosses since. Red Geoffrey carried this long spear, and, so the story goes, won his wife with it, and brought her home on the crupper from beside the Nith. She pined away and died just above where we stand now in this very tower. That was another Geoffrey's sword; they hanged him high outside Lancaster jail. He was for Prince Charlie, and cut down single-handed two of King George's dragoons carrying a warrant for a friend's arrest when the Prince's cause was lost. His wife, she poisoned herself. Those are the spurs Mad Harry rode Hell-fire for a wager down Crosbie Ghyll with, and broke his neck doing it, besides his young wife's heart. The women who married the Thurstans had an ill lot to grapple with. They were, even when they settled down to farming, men who would walk unflinching into ruin sooner than lose their grip on their purpose, and Mr Geoffrey favours them."

"They must have been just lovely," said Mrs Savine. "Say, I've taken a fancy to some of those old things. That rusty iron lamp can't be much use to anybody, but it's quaint, and I'd give it's

## The Legends of Crosbie Ghyll

weight in dollars for it. Can't you tell me where Mr Forsyth lives?"

Musker stared at her horrified, Thomas Savine laughed, and even Helen, who had appeared unusually thoughtful, smiled. Then the former answered,—

"No money could buy one of them out of the family, and if any but a Thurstan moves that lamp from where it hangs the dead men rise and come for it when midnight strikes. It is falling to pieces, but once when they took it to Kendal to be mended the smith sent a man back with it on horseback before the day had broken."

There was a few moments' silence when Musker concluded, and the ancient weapons glinted strangely as the lamp's flame wavered in the chilling draughts. A gale from the Irish Sea boomed about the crumbling tower, and all the lonely mosses seemed to swell it with their moaning. Helen shivered as she listened, for those clamorous voices of wind and rain carried her back in fancy to the old unhappy days of bloodshed and foray, and the associations of the place oppressed her. She had acquired a horror of those grim dead men whose mementoes hung above her, and whose spirits might well wander down the wild blast on such a night vainly seeking rest. Even Mrs Savine seemed to grow subdued, and her husband said,—

"We can't tell tales like these in our country, and I'm thankful we can't. Still, I daresay it was such men as these who bred in us the grit to chase the whales in the Arctic, build our railroads through the snow-barred passes, and master the primeval forest. Now we'll try to forget them, and go back out of this creepy place to the fire again."

An hour later Mrs Musker escorted Helen to her quarters. A bright fire burned in the rusty grate, and two candles on the dressing-table. "It's Mrs Forsyth's own room, and the best in the house," she said. "Musker has been telling you about the old Thurstans; he's main proud of them. I can see it

## His Master Purpose

in your face, but you needn't fear them—it's long since the last one walked. You have a kind heart, and nothing evil dare hurt you. See! I've tried to make you comfortable. You were kind to the old place's real master—many a time I've nursed him—God bless you!"

Helen was not afraid of the dead Thurstans in the slightest. She was filled with the common-sense courage which characterises the inhabitants of her new country, but she had been affected by the stories, and she sat for a time with her feet on the hearth irons gazing thoughtfully into the blaze. She had met a modern Thurstan, and found the instincts of his forebears strong within him. She considered that strength, courage, and resolution well became a man, but that gentleness and chivalrous respect for women were desirable attributes too. The Thurstans, however, had taken to bloodshed as a pastime, and broken most of their wives' hearts until it seemed they had brought a curse upon their race, and she suspected there was a measure of their brutality in the one she knew. Then remembering something he once had said, her face grew flushed and she clenched a little hand with an angry gesture, saying, "No man shall ever make a slave of me, and my husband, if I have one, must be my servant before he is my master."

Thereupon she dismissed the subject, tried to blot the stories from her memory, and presently buried her ears in the pillow to shut out the clamour of the storm. In this she was successful, and after a sound night's slumber, and an interview with Miss Thwaite next morning, resumed her journey.

Musker stood in the gate to watch the party ride away, and glancing at the coins in his hand said to Margery, "I wish they'd come often. Main interested in my stories they were all of them, and it's double what any of the shooting folks ever gave me. This one came from the young lady, and there's a way about her that puzzles me after seeing her



## The Legends of Crosbie Ghyll

mother. Dark and cold and haughty, and yet when she smiles you'd like to brush the earth she walks upon. She has the stamp, rings true like the gold she gave me, and she was kind to Mr Geoffrey. Margery, if any woman could tame him that's the one."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BREAKING OF THE JAM

It was late one moonlight night when Geoffrey Thurstan sat with a bridge-work tracing unrolled upon his knee inside his double-skinned tent above a river of British Columbia. A few good furs chequered the spruce twigs which served as carpet, and the canvas dwelling was both commodious and comfortable. A bright brass lamp hung from the ridge pole, a nickelled clock ticked cheerily upon a hanging shelf behind the neat camp cot, while the rest of the well-made furniture betokened a degree of prosperity. One of Savine's junior assistants, sent up there in an emergency to replace an older man, sat close by, and because he dwelt in a bark shanty envied Thurstan his tent.

"I can only repeat what I said months ago. The wing slide of the log pass is too short and the angle over sharp," said Geoffrey, glancing at the plan. "An extra big log will jam there some day and imperil the whole bridge. Did you send a man down to keep watch to-night?"

"The slide is in accordance with the Roads and Trails specification," answered the young man, airily. "There was no reason why we should do more work than they asked for. You're an uneasy man, Thurstan, always looking for trouble, and I've had enough of late over the rascally hoboes who, when they feel inclined, condescend to work for me. Oh, yes! I posted the lookout as soon as I heard Davies was running his saw logs down."

Thurstan hitched his chair forward and threw the

## The Breaking of the Jam

door flap back so that he could look out into the night. The tent stood perched on the hillside; with long ranks of climbing pines stretching upwards from it to the scarped rocks which held up the snow-fields on the shoulders of the mighty peaks above. Thin white mist and the roar of water rose up from the shadowy gorge below, but in one place, where the rock walls which hemmed it in sloped down, a gossamer-like structure spanned the chasm. This was a waggon-road bridge Julius Savine, the well-known contractor, was building for the Provincial authorities, and on their surveyor's recommendation he had sub-let Thurstan the construction of a pass through which saw logs and driftwood might slide without jamming between the piers. Savine, being pressed for time, had brought in a motley collection of workmen, picked up haphazard in the sea-board cities, who, after bargaining to work for a certain sum, presently demanded twenty per cent. more. Thurstan, who had picked his own assistants carefully among the sturdy small ranchers, and aided Savine's representative in resisting this demand, now surmised that the malcontents were meditating mischief. There were some mighty mean rascals among them his foreman said.

"You're looking worried again," said his companion, presently, and Thurstan answered, "Perhaps I am. I wish Davies would run his logs down by daylight, but presumably the stream is too fast for him when the waters rise. It might give some of your friends yonder an opportunity, Summers."

"You don't figure they're capable of wrecking the bridge?" said Summers, showing sudden uneasiness.

"One or two among them, including the man I had to thrash, are capable of anything. Perhaps you had better hail your watchman."

Summers blew a whistle, and an answer came back faintly through the fret of the river, "Plenty saw logs coming down. All of them handy sizes and sliding safely through."



## His Master Purpose

"That's good enough," said Summers. "I'm not made of cast-iron, and need a little sleep at times. Good-night to you!"

He departed with the cheerful confidence of the salaried man, and Thurstan, who fought for his own hand, flung himself down on his trestle cot with all his clothes on. Neither the timber slide nor the bridge were quite finished, but because rivers in that region shrink at night when the frost checks the drainage from the feeding glaciers on the peaks above, the saw-miller had insisted on driving down his logs when there was less chance of their stranding on the shoals that cumbered the high-water channel. Thurstan lay awake for some time, listening to the fret of the river, which vibrated far across the silence of the hills, and the occasional crash of a mighty log smiting the slide, while hardly had his eyelids closed than he was roused by a sound of hurried footsteps approaching the tent. He stood wide awake in the entrance before the newcomer reached it.

"There's a mighty big pine caught its butt on one slide and jammed its thin end across the pier," said the latter. "Logs piling up behind it already!"

As he spoke somebody beat upon a suspended iron sheet down in the valley and drowsy voices rose up from among the clustered tents, while Summers went by, considerably less than half-dressed, shouting, "Get a move on for any sake, before we lose the bridge!"

Five minutes later Thurstan, running across a bending plank, halted, looking down upon a group of struggling men from the rock which served as foundation for the main bridge pier, while Summers shouted confused orders beside him. The moonlight beat down mistily through the haze that rose from the river, and Geoffrey could see the long wedge-headed timber framing he had built, beside the wing on the shore-side—both so constructed that any trunk floating down would cannon off at an angle and shoot safely between the piers. But one huge red

## The Breaking of the Jam

fir had proved too long for the pass, and when its butt canted, the other end had driven athwart the point of the wedge, after which, because the river was black with drifting logs, other heavy trunks drove against it and jammed it fast. Panting men were hard at work with levers and pike-poles striving to wrench the massive trunk clear, and one lighted an air-blast flare, whose red glare flickered athwart the strip of water foaming between the piers. It showed that some of the logs forced up by the pressure were sliding out above their fellows, while, amid a horrible grinding, some driven under sank, and already that side of the river was blocked by a mass of timber. It was being added to every moment, and Thurstan feared that the unfinished piers could not long withstand the pressure, while his own work would only be paid for on completion. Nevertheless, he spent several minutes on a critical survey, and then glanced towards certain groups of dark figures watching for, he could almost fancy with satisfaction, the approaching ruin.

"She'll go down inside an hour certain, and Savine will lose thousands of dollars," said Summers, whose eyes were wide with apprehension. "I'm rattled completely. Can't you think of anything that might be done?"

"Yes!" said Thurstan, coolly. "It is, however, almost too late now. Could have been done readily if the man who should have seen to it had not turned traitor. Hallo! Where's Mattawa Tom?"

A big sinewy axe-man from the forests of Northern Ontario sprang up beside him, and Thurstan said, "I'm going to try to chop through the king log that's keying them. It's rather more than you bargained for, but will you stand by me, Tom?"

"Looks mighty like suicide!" was the dry answer. "But if you're open to chance it, I'm coming right along."

The workmen had now divided into two hostile camps, but there was a growl of admiring wonder


## His Master Purpose

from friends and foes alike when two figures, balancing bright axes, stood high upon the pier slides ready to leap down upon the working logs. Then disjointed cries went up. "Too late. You'll be smashed flatter than a flapjack when the jam breaks up! Get hold of the fools, somebody. Take their axes away!"

"I'll brain the first man who touches mine," said Thurstan, turning savagely upon those who approached him with remonstrances, and there was a simultaneous murmur from all the assembly when the adventurous pair dropped upon the timber. It rolled, groaned, and heaved beneath them as only what are called live logs can when working in a jam, and Thurstan, trusting to the creeper spikes upon his heels, sprang from one great cylinder to another behind his companion, who had a longer experience of the perilous work of log-driving. Here a gap filled with spouting foam opened up before him, there a trunk he was about to step upon, rolled over and sank, but he worked his way forward towards the centre of the fir which keyed the growing mass. It was many feet in girth, and pressed down level with the water, and already bending like a slackly-strung bow.

The example proved infectious, and his own assistants were sturdy fearless men, who risked their lives often wresting a living from the forest, so several among them prepared to follow, and two seamen deserters sprang out from the ranks of the mutineers. One stalwart forest rancher, however, tripped his comrade up, and sat upon his prostrate form shouting, "You'll stop just where you are, you blame idiot! You couldn't do nothing if you got there. Hardly room for them two fellows already where they can get at the log!"

The remaining volunteers saw the force of this, and when somebody increased the blast of the lamp so that the roaring column of flame leapt up higher, the rest stood very still staring at the two who had now gained the centre of the partly submerged log. It



## The Breaking of the Jam

requires considerable practice to acquire full mastery of the long-hafted axe, but Thurstan, who was stout of arm and keen of eye, had managed to earn his bread with it throughout one winter in an Ontario logging camp, and when he swung it aloft the heavy wedge of steel, flinging back the blast lamp's radiance, made red flashes as it circled round his head. It came down hissing close past his knee, while Mattawa Tom's blade crossed it when it rose, and the first white chip leapt up.

More followed in quick succession until they whirled in one continuous shower, and the razor-edged steel losing definite form became a confused circling brightness, under and amidst which two supple figures swayed and heaved. The red light smiting their faces showed them dewed with great drops of sweat, the swell of toil-hardened muscles on the corded arms, and the rise of each straining chest, while there was never a clash or falter, but, flash after flash, the blades came down chunking into the ever-widening notch. Summers had seen some sword play in Montreal armouries, and had heard the axe clang often on the side of Western firs, but—for Thurstan was fighting to stave off ruin—this grim struggle in the face of a desperate risk surpassed, he thought, any exhibition of fencers' skill with the steel. The trunk was bending visibly beneath the hewers, the river frothed more whitely at their feet, and the giant logs were rolling, creeping, shocking close behind, ready to plunge forward when the partly severed trunk should yield.

Thurstan felt his lungs were bursting, his heart throbbed painfully, and something drummed deafeningly inside his head. His vision also grew hazy, and he could scarcely see the widening gap in the rough bark the trenchant steel flashed into, while as the fibres strained apart on either side of it the chips yielded the easier under the biting edge. The steadily increasing jam would certainly rub the bridge piers out of existence long before any two



## His Master Purpose

men could cut the great trunk half-through, but this was not necessary, because it was now bending like a fully-drawn bow, and the pressure would burst it asunder when a little more of its outer circumference had been severed. So he smote on mechanically, choking and blinded with perspiration, until the man from Mattawa said, "She's about busted."

Just then there was a clamour from the watchers on the piers. "Come back. Whole jam's starting. King log's yielding now. Jump for your lives before the wreckage breaks away with you!"

Mattawa Tom leapt shorewards from moving log to log, but for a few moments Thurstan, who scarcely noticed his absence, smote on alone. Filled with the lust of conflict, he only remembered that it was necessary to make sure of victory before he relaxed an effort, and thrice more in succession he whirled the heavy axe above his head, while, with a sharp snapping of fibres, the fir trunk yielded beneath his feet. Then flinging his axe into the river he stood erect, breathless, a moment too late. The logs behind the one which perilously supported him were creeping forward ready for the mad rush that must follow a few seconds later.

There remained now but one poor chance of escape and he seized it instinctively. Springing along the sinking trunk, he launched himself clear of it into the river, while running men jostled each other as they surged towards the side of the timber when he sank. A wet head broke the surface, a swinging left hand followed it, and the swimmer clutched the edge of a loosely-fitted beam, and held it until strong hands reached down to him. Some gripped his wet fingers, some the back of his jacket, one even fastened in his hair; there was a heave, a scramble, and amid a hoarse cheer the rescued man fell over backwards among his rescuers.

"Thanks," said Thurstan, who stood up dripping, somewhat shakily. "Not much the worse. Ah, you were only just in time!"

## The Breaking of the Jam

The last words were lost in a deafening crash as the jam broke up, and the giant logs drove through the opening, thrashing the river into foam. They ground against their fellows, or smote the slide casing with a thunderous shock, but the stone-backed timber stood the strain, and when presently the clamour of their passage ceased, a heavy stillness brooded over the camp as the river grew empty again. Then Thurstan sought out the man from Mattawa, and laid a wet hand on his shoulder, saying, "Thank you, Tom. I won't forget the assistance you rendered me."

"That's all right," answered the brawny axe-man awkwardly. "I get my wages safe and regular, and I've tackled as tough a contract for a worse master before."

The pair were interrupted, for Davies, who owned the saw-mill lower down stream, reined in a lathered horse close by, saying, "Where have all my logs gone to? Foreman roused me to say only a few dozen had brought up in the boom, and as the boys were running them down by scores I figured they'd piled up against your bridge. Don't see any special chaos about here, though you look as if you had been in swimming; but what in the name of thunder have you done with the logs?"

"They're on their way down river," said Thurstan, drily. "We had some trouble with them which necessitated my taking a bath. But see here, what made you turn a two-hundred-foot red fir loose among them for?"

"I didn't," answered Davies, with a puzzled air. "The boys saw every log across as they fell it into standard lengths. We have no use for a two-hundred-footer and couldn't get her into the mill. Are you sure it wasn't a wind-blown log?"

"I saw the butt had been freshly cross-cut," said Thurstan, with a steely glitter in his eyes. "I understand you are pretty slack just now. As a favour, how much would you hire me your chopping gang

## His Master Purpose

a few days for? I'll tell you why I want them later."

"I'll decide in a few minutes," he added, when Davies had named a figure, and turned towards Summers. "There may be several more big red firs growing handy beside the river, and I mean to prevent any more accidents of this kind in future. If your employer will not reimburse me I will bear the cost myself. I would sooner spend my last dollar than allow any of these loafers to coerce me."

The workmen stood still, all of them curious, and a few uneasy, when raising one hand to demand attention, the contractor said, "A red fir was felled by two or three among you to-day, and launched down stream after darkness fell. I want the men who did it to step forward and explain their reasons to me."

"Then you're a mighty bold man," said Summers—who knew that although few were actually dangerous the malcontents outnumbered Thurstan's loyal assistants—admiringly.

Nobody moved among the listeners, but there was a murmuring, and all eyes were fixed upon the speaker, who leaned, either by design or accident, upon the haft of a big axe.

"I hardly expected an answer," he added. "Accordingly, I'll proceed to name the men I consider must know, and notify them that they will be paid off to-morrow."

A tumult of mingled wrath and applause commenced when Thurstan coolly called aloud a dozen names, while one voice broke through the others, "We're working for Julius Savine, an' don't count a bad two-bits on you. We'll all fling our tools into the river before we let one of them fellows go."

"Their value will in that case be deducted from wages due," said Thurstan, calmly. "Julius Savine's representative won't pay any of the men I mention



## The Breaking of the Jam

whether they work or not after this notice, and nobody who does not earn it will get a single meal out of the cook shanty. I'll give you until to-morrow to make up your minds in." Then he added aside to Davies, "I'll take your lumber gang in any case. Go back and send them in as soon as you can."

The assembly broke up in a divided state of mind, for, though it was very late, little groups lingered disputing outside the tents, and at intervals angry voices went up. Summers set out for the railroad to communicate by telegraph with his employer when the offices were open, and Thurstan retired to his tent, where he went peacefully to sleep. Awakening later than usual, he listened with apparent unconcern to Mattawa Tom, who roused him, saying,—

"It's time you were out. Them fellows are coming along for their money. The boys called a big roll up as soon as the lumber gang marched in, and though there was considerable wild talking, the sensible ones allowed it was no more use kicking."

"That's all right," said Thurstan, who paid the departing worthies without further comment, and was glad to get rid of them, knowing that now, because the lumber men, who were mostly poor settlers and worked for others on opportunity that they might subsist during the rest of the year clearing their own land, had small sympathy with the mutineers, there would be at least a balance of power. He set them to work immediately lengthening the wing of the log slide and the wedge guards of the piers, toiled as hard as any two among them himself, and to the astonishment of all the rest, completed the undertaking before the week was over.

"I hardly like to say what it has cost me, but no log of any length could jam itself in the new pass," he said to Summers.





## His Master Purpose

"You're an enterprising man," was the answer. "Savine is a bit of a rustler, too, and you'll have a chance of explaining things to him to-morrow. I have just word from him that he's coming through."



## CHAPTER VII

### A REST BY THE WAY

IT was afternoon when Julius Savine, accompanied by Summers, who had, during the journey from the railroad, fully explained what had happened, entered Thurstan's tent. Geoffrey rose to greet him, and glanced at his employer with some curiosity, for having merely sent in a tender to the contractor's office he had not met him personally before. Savine, he thought, was fifty years of age at least, a man of quick restless movements and apparently nervous disposition, with keen eyes, and the grey that tinged his long moustache sprinkled lightly among his hair. He was known to be not only a daring engineer, but a generally successful speculator in mining and industrial enterprise. Nevertheless, Geoffrey fancied that something in his face gave a hint of physical weakness.

"I have heard one or two creditable things about you, and thought of asking you to run up to my offices, but I'm glad to meet you now," he said, and smiled a little, adding when Thurstan made a solemn bow, "There; I've been sufficiently civil, and I see you would rather I talked business. Well, I'm considerably indebted to you for the way you tackled the late crisis, and approve of the log-guard's extension. How much did the extra work cost you?"

"Here is the wages bill and a list of the iron work charged at cost," said Thurstan. "As I did it without any orders you would be justified in declining to pay it, and I have included no profit."

"Ah!" said Savine, who glanced over and scribbled

## His Master Purpose

across the paper, looking up with a twinkle in his eye. "Have you been acquiring riches latterly? My cashier will pay that note whenever you hand it in at Vancouver; I'll also initial your contract for payment if you will give it me. Further, I want to say that I've been to look at your work, and it pleases me. There are plenty men in this province would have done it as solidly, but it's the general design and ingenious fixings that take my fancy. May I ask where you got the notions?"

"From — in England. I spent some time in his drawing office," said Geoffrey; and Savine, who looked at him critically, nodded as if in recognition of the celebrated name, then smiled again when Thurstan showed signs of resenting his inspection.

"In that case I should say you ought to do," he observed, cheerfully.

"I don't understand," said Thurstan, and Savine answered,—

"No? Well, if you'll wait a few moments I'll try to make things plain to you. I'm wanting a live man with brains of his own, and some knowledge of mechanical science. No trouble about getting them by the car load from the East or the Old Country, but the man for me must know how to use his muscles, if necessary, and handle axe and drill as well. In short, I want one who has been right through the mill as you seem to have done, and so long as he earns it I'm not going to worry over his salary."

"I'm afraid I would not suit you," said Geoffrey. "I'm rather too fond of my own way to make a good servant, and of late I have not done badly fighting for my own hand. Therefore, while I thank you, and should be glad to undertake any minor contracts you can give me, I prefer to continue as at present."

"I should not fancy you would be particularly easy to get on with," said Savine, with another shrewd glance but unabated good humour. "Still, what you suggest might also suit me. I have rather more work at present than I can hold on to with

## A Rest by the Way

both hands, and have tolerably good accounts of you. Say, come West with me and spend the week end at my house, where we could talk things over quietly."

Geoffrey was gratified—for the speaker was famous in his profession—and showed it as he answered, "I consider myself fortunate that you should ask me."

"I figured you were not fond of compliments, and I'm a plain man myself," said Savine, with the humour apparent in his keen eyes again. "I will, however, give you one piece of advice before I forget it. My sister-in-law might be there, and if she wants to doctor you, don't let her. She has a weakness for physicking strangers, and the results are occasionally embarrassing."

It happened accordingly that Thurstan, who had overhauled his wardrobe in Vancouver city, duly arrived at a pretty wooden villa looking down upon a deep blue inlet. He knew the mountain valleys of Cumberland, and had wandered, sometimes footsore and hungry, under the giant ramparts of the Selkirks and Rockies, almost appalled at dawn and sunset by their majesty, but he fancied he had never seen a fairer spot than the reft in the hills which sheltered Savine's villa, and was known by its Indian name, "The Place of the Hundred Springs."

For a background sombre cedars lifted their fretted spires against the skyline on the southern hand; beneath them the hillsides closed in and the emerald green of maples and tawny tufts of oak rolled down to a breadth of milk-white pebbles and stretch of silver sand, past which clear green water shoaling from shade to shade wound inland. Threads of glancing spray quivered in and out among the foliage, and high above, beyond a strip of sparkling sea and set part by filmy cloud from all the earth below stretched the giant saw-edge of the Coast Range's snow.

The white-painted, red-roofed dwelling, with its green-latticed shutters, tasteful scroll work and ample, if indifferently swarded, lawns, was pleasant

## His Master Purpose

to look upon, but Thurstan found more pleasure in the sight of its young mistress, who awaited him in a great cool room hung with deer-head trophies and floored with parquetry of native timber. Helen Savine wore a white dress with her favourite crimson roses nestling in the alluring curve at the waist of it, and though she greeted him with indifferent cordiality, was surprised when her eyes rested upon him. Thurstan was not a man of the conventional type one meets and straightway forgets, and she had thought about him at times, but since the night at Crosbie Ghyll his image had chiefly presented itself as she first saw him—ragged, hungry, and grim, a worthy descendant of the wild Thurstans Musker had discoursed about. Now, in spite of his weather-beaten face and hard, ingrained hands, he appeared what he was, a man of education and some refinement, while his resolute expression, erect carriage, and muscular frame, rendered lithe and almost statuesque by much swinging of the axe, gave him an indefinite air of distinction. Again she decided that Geoffrey Thurstan was a well-favoured man, but remembering Musker's stories, set herself to watch for some trace of inherent barbarity, which was unfortunate for Geoffrey, because in such cases observers generally discover what they search for.

Geoffrey was placed beside Helen at dinner, and having lived very hardly since he left England, and even before that time, it seemed strange to him to be deftly waited upon at a table glittering with silver and gay with flowers. Mrs Thomas Savine sat opposite between her husband and the host, and Helen found certain suspicions confirmed when Savine referred to the crushing of the strike. He had already given his daughter a brief account of it.

"It was daringly done," said Helen, "but I wonder, Mr Thurstan, if you and others who hold the power ever consider the opposite side of the question. It may be that those men, whose task is evidently highly dangerous, have wives and children depending upon

## A Rest by the Way

them, and a few extra dollars, earned hardly enough, no doubt, might mean so much to them."

"I am afraid I don't always do so," answered Geoffrey. "I toiled tolerably hard as a workman myself, and if any employee considered he was underpaid for the risk he ran, and said so civilly, I should listen to him. On the other hand, for unfortunately we must all fight fiercely for a living, if any combination strove by unfair means to coerce me, I should spare no effort to crush it!"

Thurstan was generally too much in earnest to make a pleasant dinner-table conversationalist, and as he spoke he shut one big brown hand. It was a trifling action, and he was perhaps unconscious of it, but Helen, who noticed the flicker in his eyes and the vindictive tightening of the hard fingers, shrank from him instinctively.

"Is that not a cruel doctrine, and is there no room for a gentler policy in your profession? Must the weak always be trampled out of existence?" she said, with a slight trace of indignation.

Thurstan turned towards her with a slightly puzzled expression, Julius Savine smiled, but his sister-in-law, who had remained silent, but not unobservant, unusually long, broke in, "You believe in the hereditary transmission of character, Mr Thurstan?"

"I think most people do to some extent," said Geoffrey. "But why do you ask me?"

"It's quite simple," said Mrs Savine, smiling. "Did my husband tell you we were in England, and were held up by a storm one night in your ancestral home? There was a man who ought to belong to the feudal ages there called Musker, and he told us very quaint stories about some of you. I fancy Geoffrey, who robbed the king's dragoons, must have looked just like you when you shut your fingers so a few minutes ago."

"I am a little surprised," said Geoffrey. "Musker used to talk a great deal of romantic nonsense, and

## His Master Purpose

Crosbie Ghyll is no longer mine. I hope you passed a pleasant night there." Then Mrs Savine became eloquent, when her brother-in-law, who appeared interested, observed,—

"So far you have not told me about that particular adventure."

Again the incident was unfortunate for Geoffrey, because Helen, who had no great respect for her aunt's perceptions, decided that if the similitude had struck even that lady, she was right in her own estimation of Thurstan's character.

"We heard several instances of reckless daring, and we Colonials consider all the historic romance of the land we sprang from belongs to us as well as you," she said. "So, if it is not an intrusion, may I ask if any of those border warriors were remarkable for deeds of self-abnegation or charity?"

"I am afraid not," said Geoffrey, rather grimly. "Neither did any of them ever do much towards the making of history, being generally too busy protecting their property or seizing that of their neighbours. But, at least, when they fought they seem to have fought for the losing side, and, according to tradition, paid for it dearly. However, to change the subject, is it fair to hold any man responsible for his predecessors' shortcomings? They have gone back to the dust long ago, and it is the present that concerns us."

"Still, can anybody avoid the results of those shortcomings or virtues?" persisted Helen, and her father broke in,—

"I hardly think so. There is an instance beside you, Mr Thurstan. Miss Savine's grandfather ruled in paternally feudal fashion over a few dozen superstitious habitants way back in old-world Quebec, as his folks had done since the first French colonisation. That explains my daughter's views on social matters and her weakness for playing the somewhat autocratic Lady Bountiful. The Seigneurs were benevolent village despots with very quaint ways."

## A Rest by the Way

Savine spoke lightly, and one person only noticed that the face of his daughter was slightly less pale in colouring than before, but that one afterwards remembered her father's words and took them as a clue to the woman's character. He also found that Helen Savine was both generous and benevolent, but she loved to rule, and rule somewhat autocratically.

The first day passed like a pleasant dream to the man who had toiled for a bare living in the shadowy forests or knelt all day among hot rocks holding the weary drill with bleeding fingers, and his host grew more and more interested in him, while during the second he made great advances in the estimation of Mrs Thomas Savine. Bicycles were not so common a woman's possession in Canada, or elsewhere, then. In fact, there were few roads in British Columbia fit to propel one on, but an American friend had sent Miss Savine what she called a hundred-dollar-wheel which, after a few journeys over a corduroy road, groaned most distressfully whenever she mounted it. Helen desired to ride in to the railroad on the day in question, but the gaudy machine complained even more than usual, and when at last one of its wheels declined to revolve at all, Julius Savine called Geoffrey's attention to it.

"If you are anxious for mild excitement, and to earn my daughter's gratitude, you might tackle that confounded thing, Mr Thurstan," he said. "The local blacksmith shakes his head over it, and sent it back the last time worse than ever, with, so Helen fancies, several necessary portions of its interior missing. After running many kinds of machines in my time, I'm willing to own that this particular specimen defies me."

Now Thurstan had stripped and fitted various intricate mining appliances, but he had never struggled with a bicycle, which probably still surpasses any other machine in contrariety. So, when Helen accepted his offer of assistance with a queenly graciousness, he wheeled the machine out upon the



## His Master Purpose

lawn and proceeded light-heartedly to dismantle it, while both the Savines lounged in cane chairs encouraging him over their cigars. The dismantling was comparatively simple, but when the time for re-assembling came, Thurstan, who found that certain cups could not by any legitimate means be induced to screw home into their places, was perforce obliged to rest the machine upon two chairs and wriggle underneath it, where he reclined upon his back with grimy oil dripping upon his forehead. He crawled out to breathe at intervals, red and black in face, and Helen made stern efforts to conceal her mingled alarm and merriment, when Thomas Savine said,—

“Will you take long odds, Thurstan, that you never make that invention of his Satanic Majesty run straight again?”

His wife, however, cautioned the operator about sunstroke and apoplexy, while, when Thomas Savine caught Helen's eye, both, guessing the drift of these remarks, laughed outright, and Geoffrey mistaking the reason felt hurt, and determined to conquer the bicycle or remain beneath it all night. Thrice he fitted what he afterwards learned was termed the bottom bracket, and each time discovered that the bearing balls it should have contained had, escaping, sought refuge inside four different tubes, while, when he had at last reduced them to order and straightened his aching back, he hoped he did not look so disgusted, grimy and savage as he undoubtedly felt.

“You must really let it alone,” said Helen. “The sun is very hot, and perhaps you might be more successful after luncheon. I have noticed that when mending bicycles a rest and refreshment sometimes prove beneficial.”

“That's so!” said Thomas Savine. “Young Harry used to tackle it on just those lines. Used up several of my best Cubanos and a bottle of claret each time, before he had finished; and then I was never convinced that the thing went any better.”

## A Rest by the Way

"You must beware of ruining your health," interposed Mrs Savine. "Mending bicycles frequently leads to an accumulation of malevolent humours. Did I interrupt you, Mr Thurstan?"

"I was only going to say that it is nearly finished, and I should not like to be vanquished by an affair of this kind," said Geoffrey, grimly. "When I have got this leather contrivance on the whole trouble should be over. Would it hurt the machine if I stood it upon its head, Miss Savine?"

"Oh, no, and I am so grateful," said Helen, noticing guiltily that there was oil and red dust, beside many sombre smears upon the operator's face and jacket, while the skin was missing from several of his knuckles.

"That leather contrivance is the worst of all," said Thomas Savine, chuckling; and Helen endeavoured to conceal her alarm when Thurstan, finding it hard to retain his patience, proceeded to wrench the gear case over its frame. It was done at last, and Geoffrey sighed, while the rest of the party expressed their surprise as well as admiration when the wheels revolved freely without click or groan. Julius Savine nodded with more than casual approval, and Helen was very gracious with her thanks.

"You look quite faint," said Mrs Savine. "It was the hot sun on your forehead, and the mental excitement. Such things are often followed by dangerous consequences, and you must take a dose of my elixir. Helen, dear, you know where to find the bottle."

Julius Savine was guilty of a slight gesture of impatience, his brother laughed, while Helen seemed anxious to slip away, and Geoffrey answered,—

"I hardly think one should get very mentally excited over a bicycle. I feel perfectly well, and only somewhat greasy, madam."

"That is just one of the symptoms. Yes, you have hit it—greasy feeling!" broke in the amateur dispenser, who rarely relaxed her efforts until she

## His Master Purpose

had run down her victim. "Helen, why don't you hunt round for that bottle?"

"I mean greasy externally, madam," said Geoffrey in desperation, and again Thomas Savine chuckled, while Helen, who ground one little boot-heel into the grasses, deliberately turned away. Mrs Savine, however, cheerfully departed to find the bottle in person, and returned with it and a wine glass. She filled the latter with an inky fluid which smelt unpleasantly, and said to Geoffrey,—

"You will be distinctly better the moment you have taken this!"

Geoffrey took the goblet, walked apart a few paces, and, making a wry face, heroically swallowed the bitter draught, after which Mrs Savine, who beamed upon him, said,—

"You feel quite different, don't you?"

"Yes!" said Geoffrey, truthfully, longing to add that he had felt perfectly well before and had now to make violent efforts to overcome his nausea.

His heroism, had, however, its reward, for when Helen returned from her ride, she said, "I was really ashamed when my aunt insisted on doctoring you, but you must take it as a compliment, because she only prescribes for the people she takes a fancy to. I hope it was not particularly nasty?"

"Sorry for you, Thurstan, from experience!" said Thomas Savine. "When I see that bottle, I just vacate the locality. The taste isn't the worst of it by a long way."

That night Julius Savine called Geoffrey into his study, and, spreading a roll of plans before him, offered terms, which the latter gladly accepted, for the construction of portions of several works. He also said, "No, I won't worry much about references. Your work speaks for itself, and the Roads and Trails surveyor has been talking about you. I'll take you, as you'll have to take me, on trust. I keep my eye on rising young men, and I have been watching you. Besides, the man who could master an obstinate



## A Rest by the Way

bicycle the first time he wrestled with one must have some sense of his own, and it isn't everybody who would have swallowed that physic."

"I could not well avoid doing so," said Geoffrey, with a rueful smile.

"I feel I owe you an apology, but it's my sister-in-law's one weakness, and you have won her favour for the rest of your natural life," said Savine. "You have also had several distinguished fellow-sufferers, including provincial representatives and railroad directors, for to my horror she physicked a very famous one the last time he came. He did not suffer with your equanimity. In fact, he was almost uncivil, and said to me, 'If the secretary hadn't sent off your trestle contract, I should urge the board to reconsider it. Did you ask me here that your relatives might poison me, Savine?'"

Geoffrey laughed, and his host added,—

"I want to talk over a good many details with you, and daresay you deserve a holiday—know I do—so I shall retain you here for a week, at least. Take your consent for granted, it's really necessary."

## CHAPTER VIII

### GEOFFREY STANDS FIRM

GEOFFREY THURSTAN possessed a fine constitution, and, in spite of Mrs Savine's treatment and her husband's predictions, rose refreshed and vigorous on the morning that succeeded his struggle with the bicycle. It was also a glorious morning, and when breakfast was over he revelled in the unusual luxury of a lounge under the shadow of a cedar on the lawn, breathing in the cool breeze which rippled the sparkling straits with great content. Hitherto he had risen to commence a day of toil and anxiety with the sun, and this brief glimpse of a life of ease with the pleasures of congenial companionship was as an oasis in the desert to him.

"A few days will be as much as is good for me," he said half-aloud, with a sigh. "In the meantime, hard work and short commons are considerably more appropriate, but I shall win the right to all these things some day, if my strength holds out."

His forehead grew wrinkled, his eyes contracted, and he stared straight before him, seeing neither the luminous green of the maples nor the whispering cedars, but as it were far off in the misty future a golden possibility, which if well worth winning, must be painfully striven for in the present, until his reverie was suddenly broken.

"Are your thoughts very serious this morning, Mr Thurstan?" a clear voice said, and the most alluring of the visions he had conjured up stood before him, losing nothing by the translation into material flesh. Helen Savine had halted under the cedar, glancing

## Geoffrey Stands Firm

at him, a most attractive figure in soft clinging draperies of white and cream.

"I am afraid they were," he answered, and Helen laughed musically.

"One would fancy that you took life too much in earnest," she said. "It is fortunately impossible to either work or pile up dollars for ever, and a holiday is good for everybody. I am going down to White Rock Cove to see if my marine garden is as full of beauty as it used to be. Would you care to inspect it and carry this basket for me?"

Thurstan showed his pleasure almost too openly, and the pair chatted lightly on many things as they paced together, knee-deep, at times, among scarlet wine-berries, and the delicate green and ebony of maidenhair fern, down shadowy forest aisles. The scents and essence of summer hung heavy in the air, shafts of golden sunlight piercing the sombre canopy, touched, and it seemed to him etherealised, his companion, who was unusually gracious, but the very completeness of his enjoyment troubled the man, so that he lapsed into silence. All this appeared too good, too pleasant, he feared, to last.

"Do you know you have not answered my last question, nor spoken a word for the last ten minutes," said Helen with a smile, at length. "Have these woods no charm for you, or are you regretting your lounge and the cigar-box beneath the cedar?"

Geoffrey turned towards her, and there was a momentary flash in his eyes as he answered, "You must forgive me. Keen enjoyment often blunts the edge of speech, and I was longing that this walk through the cool, green stillness might last for ever."

He ceased somewhat abruptly, fearful that he had said too much, and then, after the fashion of one unskilled in tricks of speech, proceeded to remedy one blunder by committing another.

"It reminds me of the evenings at Graham's ranche. There can surely be no sunsets in the world to equal

## His Master Purpose

those that flame along the snows of British Columbia, and you will remember how we watched them burn and fade together."

It was an unfortunate reference, for Helen had recalled that period with misgivings now and then. Cut off from all converse with people of similar tastes in the mountain solitude, she had not only found the man's society congenial and interesting, but had allowed herself to sink into an indefinite state of companionship with him, which had seemed perfectly natural then, but was, she fancied, impossible under different circumstances. It was only on the last occasion he had ever hinted at a continuance of this intimacy, but she had not forgotten the rash speech. Had the recollections been all upon her own side she might have permitted a partial renewal of the comradeship, but she stiffened at once when her companion without premeditation, though she did not know this, ventured to remind her of it.

"Yes," she said reflectively. "The spectacle was often impressive, but we are all of us unstable, and what pleases us at one time may well prove tiresome at another. If that experience were repeated I should very possibly find even the sunsets monotonous, and grow sadly discontented at Graham's ranche."

Geoffrey was not only shrewd enough to comprehend that if Miss Savine unbent during a summer holiday in the wilderness, it did not follow that she would always do so, but also felt he deserved the rebuke. He had, however, learned patience in Canada, and was content to bide his time, so he answered good-humouredly that such a result might well be possible, and said nothing further until they halted where the hillside fell sharply to the verge of a cliff. Far down below he could see the white pebbles shine through translucent brine, and with professional instincts roused surveyed the slope to the head of the crag dubiously.

Julius Savine, or somebody under his orders, had

## Geoffrey Stands Firm

constructed a zig-zag pathway which wound down between small maples and clusters of wine-berries shimmering like blood-drops among their glossy leaves. In places it was underpinned with timber against the side of an almost sheer descent, and he noticed that one could have dropped a vertical line from the fish-hawk, which hung poised a few feet outside one angle, into the brine. They descended cautiously to the first sharp bend, and here Geoffrey turned round in advance of his companion saying, "Do you mind telling me how long it is since you or anybody else has used this path, Miss Savine?"

"I came up this way last autumn, and hardly think any other person has used it since. But why do you ask?"

"I fancied so!" and Geoffrey lapsed instinctively into his brusque, professional style of comment, which was a pity. "Poor system of underpinning, badly fixed yonder. I am afraid you must find some other way down to the beach this morning."

Now, it was long since Helen had heard anybody apply the word must to herself. As Julius Savine's only daughter, most of her wishes had been immediately gratified, while the men she met vied with one another in paying her homage. In addition to this, her father, in whose mechanical abilities she had supreme faith, had constructed that pathway especially for her pleasure. So from several reasons her pride took fire, and she answered coldly, "The path is perfectly safe. My father himself watched the greater portion of its building."

"It was safe, no doubt," answered Geoffrey, slightly puzzled as to how he had offended her, but still resolute. "The rains of last winter have, however, washed out much of the surface soil, leaving bare parts of the rock beneath, and the next angle yonder is positively dangerous. Can we not go round?"

"Only by the head of the valley, two miles away at least," and Helen's tone remained the reverse of cordial. "I have climbed both in the Selkirks and



## His Master Purpose

the Coast Range, and to anyone with a clear head, even in the most slippery places there cannot be any real danger."

"I regret I cannot agree with you. I devoutly wish I could," said Geoffrey, uneasily. "No! you must please go no further, Miss Savine."

The girl's eyes glittered dangerously; a damask flush crept into the centre of either cheek as she came towards him, for Geoffrey, who fumed inwardly at the action forced upon him, was always somewhat decided in speech, and had been handling mutinous workmen of late. So, though he did not intend it, there was perhaps too strong a suggestion of command in his attitude, and when Helen came abreast of him, he laid a hard hand restrainingly upon her arm.

She shook it off, not with ill-humoured petulance, for Helen was never ungraceful nor undignified, but with a cold disdain that hurt the man far more. He would have considered a flash of hot anger natural, but instead of this his companion made him feel that his opinions carried absolutely no weight with her, and were hardly worth controverting. The knowledge might have galled a more tranquil man when those opinions were the outcome of arduous practice and patient study. Nevertheless, knowing he was right, he was equally resolute that she should run no risk, and letting his hand swing to his side, walked a few paces before her, and then turned in a narrow portion of the path where no two people could pass abreast.

"Please listen to me, Miss Savine," he commenced. "I am an engineer, and I can see that the bend yonder is dangerous. I cannot therefore consent to allow you to venture upon it. How should I face your father if anything unfortunate happened?"

"My father saw the path built," repeated Helen. "He is also an engineer, and said to be one of the most skilful in the Dominion. I am not used to being thwarted for inadequate reasons. Let me pass."

## Geoffrey Stands Firm

Geoffrey stood very erect and immovable, his forehead wrinkled, the rest of his face hard set, saying quietly, "I am very sorry, Miss Savine, that, in this one instance, I cannot obey you."

There was an awkward silence, and while the pair looked at one another, Helen felt her breath come faster. She tried to picture the man before her as a mere wandering adventurer presuming upon her father's kindness, and failed to do so. There was nothing arrogant in his attitude, though he seemed very determined, and the girl grew hot with anger. Then retreating a few paces she seated herself upon a boulder, leaving the onus of terminating an unpleasant position upon Geoffrey. He was puzzled for a time how to do so, and, during the interval, Helen, recalling Musker's stories, felt her opinion that he was harsh and overbearing, without pity or consideration, confirmed. As usual with persons of her disposition, it did not strike her that, on some points, she might be wholly mistaken.

Then an inspiration dawned upon Geoffrey, who said, "Perhaps you would feel the disappointment less if I convinced you by ocular demonstration."

Walking cautiously forward to the dangerous angle, he grasped a broken edge of the rock outcrop about which the path twisted, and pressed hard with both feet upon the edge of the narrow causeway. It was a hazardous experiment, and the result of it striking, for next moment there was a crash and a rattle, and Geoffrey remained with one foot in a cranny, clinging to the rock, while a mass of earth and timber slid down the steep-pitched slope and disappeared over the face of the crag. A hollow splashing rose suggestively from far beneath. Thereupon Helen, who had been too angry to notice the consideration for herself implied in the man's last speech, turned her eyes upon the ground and did not raise them until, after swinging himself carefully on to firmer soil, he approached her saying, "I hope,

## His Master Purpose

after what you have seen, you will forgive me for preventing your descent."

"You used considerable violence, and I am still unconvinced," and Helen rose as she spoke. "In any case, you have at least made further progress impossible, and we may as well retrace our steps. No; I do not wish to hear any more upon the subject. It is really not worth further discussion."

They turned back together, but when the ascent grew steeper, and Geoffrey held out his hand, instead of accepting the proffered assistance as she had done when they descended, Helen apparently failed to see it, and the homeward journey was not particularly pleasant to either. Helen did not parade her displeasure, but Geoffrey was sensible of it nevertheless, and never being a fluent speaker upon casual subjects, he was not strikingly successful in his conversational efforts. When at last he reached the villa, he shook his shoulders disgustedly as he recalled some of his sage remarks.

"It was hardly a wonder she was silent. Heavens, what prompted me to drivel in that style?" he said. "It was cruelly unfortunate, but I could not let her risk her precious safety over that confounded path!"

During lunch it happened that Mrs Savine said, "I saw you going towards the White Rock Cove, Helen. Very interesting place, isn't it, Mr Thurstan? But you brought none of that lovely weed back with you."

"Did you notice how I had the path graded as you went down?" asked Savine; and Thurstan saw that Helen's eyes were fixed upon him. Their expression roused his indignation because the glance was not a challenge, but, so it seemed, a warning that whatever his answer might be, the result would be indifferent to her. He was hurt that she should suppose for a moment he would profit by this opportunity.

"We were not able to descend the whole way," he replied. "Last winter's rains have loosened the

## Geoffrey Stands Firm

surface soil, and one angle of the path slipped bodily away. Very fortunately I was some distance in advance of Miss Savine, and there was not the slightest danger. Might I suggest socketed timbers? The occurrence reminds me of a curious accident to the railroad track in the Rockies."

Helen did not glance at the speaker again, for Savine rising to the bait asked no awkward questions, but Thurstan saw no more of her during the afternoon, while that evening he sought Savine in his study.

"You have all been very kind to me," he said. "In fact, so much so that I feel if I stay any longer among you, I shall never be content to rough it when I go back to the bush. This is only too pleasant, but, being a poor man with a living to earn, it would be more consistent if I recommenced my work. Which of the operations should I undertake first?"


Savine smiled on him whimsically, and answered with Western directness, "I don't know if the Roads Surveyor was right or wrong when he said that you were not always over-civil. See here, Thurstan, leaving all personal amenities out of the question, I'm inclined to figure that you will be of use to me, and the connection will also help you considerably. My paid representatives are not always so energetic as they might be. So if you are tired of High Maples you can start in with the rock-cutting on the new waggon road. It is only a detail, but I want it finished, and as the cars would bring you down in two hours' time, I'll expect you to put in the weekend here, talking over more important things with me."

Thurstan departed next morning, and saw nothing of Helen, who, it appeared, had ridden out into the forest before he left High Maples. She admitted to herself that she was interested in Thurstan, the more so that he alone, of all the men she had met, had successfully resisted her will. But she also shrank from him,



## His Master Purpose

and though convinced by reflection that his recent action had been justified, could not quite forgive him, which was, of course, unreasonable, if perhaps natural. Helen was young, and had hitherto enjoyed perhaps rather more than was good for her of her own way.



## CHAPTER IX

### SAVINE'S CONFIDENCE

IN spite of his employer's invitation Thurstan did not return to High Maples at the end of the week. The rock cutting engrossed all his attention, and he was also conscious that it might be desirable to allow Miss Savine's indignation to cool. He had thought of her often since the day she gave him the dollar, and, at first still smarting under the memory of another woman's treachery, had tried to analyse his feelings regarding her. The result was not very definite, though he decided as a side issue that he had never really loved Millicent, and was very certain now that she had wasted little affection upon him. Then one evening, when they stood silently together under the early stars outside Graham's ranche, he became suddenly conscious of the all-important fact, that his life would be empty without Helen Savine, and that of all the women he had met she alone could guide and raise him towards a higher plane.

It was characteristic of Geoffrey Thurstan that the determination to win her in spite of every barrier of wealth and rank came with the revelation, and that, at the same time counting the cost, he realised that he must first bid boldly for a name and station, and with all patience bide his time. A more cold-blooded man might have abandoned the quest as hopeless at the first, and one more impulsive have ruined his chances by rashness, but Geoffrey united the characteristics of the reckless Thurstans with his mother's cool North Country canniness.

## His Master Purpose

It therefore happened that Savine, irritated by a journalistic reference to the tardiness of that season's road-making, came down to see how this particular operation was progressing, bringing his daughter, who desired to visit the wife of a prosperous rancher in the vicinity, with him. It was towards noon of a hot day when they alighted from their horses in the mouth of a gorge that wound inland from the margin of a lake. No breath of wind ruffled the steely surface, white boulder and sombre fir branch slept motionless, reflected in the crystal depths, and lines of great black cedars, that kept watch upon it from the ridge above, stood mute beneath the sun, diffusing resinous fragrance, without one tiny spray whispering.

"It is beautiful," said Helen. "One never grows tired of the scent of the conifers. It was doubtless made with all good things at the beginning, clean, restful and healing, surpassing anything that man has ever succeeded in distilling. I see you are as usual smiling at me, instead of feeling shame at the sight of yonder heaps of débris and the raw red gash in the hill."

"Men can't live on scenery," said Savine. "Isn't it better to feed a hundred sturdy families than leave the land barren for the wolf and the deer? Even if they're not pretty, I like a few saw-mills and mine dumps scattered round the landscape. They mean work and bread for the men we're raising, and, incidentally, new dresses and opera tickets for Miss Helen Savine. There's no doubt that Thurstan's a live man, and he has got the new cutting well on the way."

They picked their path carefully through the débris littering an ugly rent in the rock, where perspiring men were toiling hard with pick and drill, and came upon their employer before he was aware of them. Thurstan was now once more dressed in knee-boots and coarse blue jean like his assistants, and stood with a heavy hammer in his hand critically

## Savine's Confidence

surveying a somewhat seedy individual who was just then offering him his services. Savine, who had a sense of humour, was interested in the scene, and said to his daughter, "Thurstan's busy. We'll just wait until he's through with that fellow."

Geoffrey, being ignorant of their presence, at once decided that the applicant, who said he was an Englishman, and used to estimating quantities, would be of little service, but he seldom refused to assist a stranger in distress, and the one in question looked as though he needed wages at least.

"I do all the draughting and figuring work myself, besides as much as possible of the other kind," he said. "However, if you are hard up you can earn two dollars daily wheeling broken rock in yonder barrow until you find something better."

The other man turned away, apparently not highly delighted at the prospect of wheeling a barrow, and Geoffrey faced about to greet the spectators.

"I don't fancy you'll get much work out of that fellow," said Savine.

"I did not expect to see you so soon, and am pleasantly surprised," said Geoffrey, who, warned by something in Helen's face, restrained the answer he was about to make. "You will be tired after your rough ride, and it is very hot out here. If you will come into my office tent I can offer you some slight refreshment."

The visitors did so and Helen wondered, for the double tent was singularly neat and trim. Its flooring of packed twigs gave out a pleasant aromatic odour, the instruments littered among the papers on the maple desk were silver-mounted, and the tall, dusty man in toil-stained jean produced artistic glasses, as well as mineral waters and Californian wine from a pail of cool spring water beneath it, besides a tin of the best English ornamental biscuits. He was a curious combination, she fancied, having seen him rendered almost repulsive by grime and



## His Master Purpose

perspiration, toiling with savage energy with axe or pick.

They chatted for perhaps half-an-hour, and then there was an interruption, for the young Englishman, who had grown tired of wheeling the barrow within that period, stood outside the tent demanding to see his employer. Geoffrey strode out into the sunshine, and, as he forgot to draw the loose canvas to, what followed was perfectly audible.

The stranger said he had a back ache, besides blisters on his hands, and found that wheeling a heavy barrow did not agree with him. He also added, with an easy assurance that drew a frown to the contractor's face, "It's a considerable come down for me to have to work hard at all, and I was told you were generally good to a distressed countryman. Can't you really give me anything easier?"

"I try to be—when they're worth it," said Geoffrey, drily. "Would you care to hold a rock drill, or swing a sledge instead?"

"I hardly think so," answered the other, dubiously. "You see I haven't been trained to manual labour, and I'm not so strong as you might think by looking at me." Geoffrey lost his temper.

"The drill might also blister your fingers, I dare say," he answered with a fine sarcasm. "Then I'm afraid you are too good for this rude country, and I have no use for you. I could afford to be decent? Perhaps so, but I earn my dollars considerably harder than you seem willing to do. The cook will give you dinner with the rest to-day, then you can resume your search for an easy billet. We have no room in this camp for idlers."

Savine chuckled, but Helen, who had a weakness for philanthropy, and small practical experience of its economic aspect, flushed with indignation, pitying the stranger and resenting what she considered Thurstan's brutality. Her father rose, when the contractor came in, to say that he would look round the workings. He suggested that Helen should

## Savine's Confidence

remain with Geoffrey in the shade, and when the latter placed a canvas lounge for her outside the tent, Miss Savine turned towards him, saying,—

"Why did you speak to that poor man so cruelly? Perhaps I am transgressing, but it seems to me that one living here in comfort, even comparative luxury, might be a little more considerate toward those less fortunate."

"Please remember that I was once what you term less fortunate myself," said Geoffrey; and Helen answered quickly, "One would almost fancy it was you who had forgotten."

"On the contrary! I am not likely to forget how hardly I earned my first fee," and the man looked straight at the speaker. "I was glad to work up to my waist in ice-water to win at first scarcely one and a half dollars daily. One must exercise discretion, Miss Savine, and that man, so far as I could see, had no desire to earn the money."

It was a pity that Geoffrey did not explain that he meant Bransome's payment by the words "my first fee"—for Helen had never forgotten how she had failed in the attempt to double the sum her companion had bargained for. She already considered him destitute of all the gentler graces, but was surprised he should apparently endeavour to wound her sensibilities.

"Is it right to judge so hastily?" she answered, mastering her indignation with difficulty. "The poor man may not be fit for hard work—I think he said so, and I cannot help growing wrathful at times when I hear stories which reach me of commercial avarice and tyranny."

Geoffrey, rising, blew a silver whistle, spoke to the foreman, who came up in a hurry, and then said quietly, "Your *protégé* shall have an opportunity of proving his willingness to be useful by helping the cook."

"Why did you do that—now?" and Helen was uncertain whether to be gratified or angry at this action, though curiously dissatisfied both with the

## His Master Purpose

man and herself, when Geoffrey answered, "Because I fancied it would meet with your approval."

"Then," and Helen looked past him, "if that was your only motive, you were mistaken."

The conversation languished after this, and both were glad when Savine returned to escort his daughter part of the way to the ranch, while, when he rode back into camp an hour later alone, he dismounted with difficulty, and his face was grey as he reeled into the tent.

"Give me some wine, Thurstan—brandy if you have it, and don't ask questions. I shall be better in five minutes—I hope," he gasped.

Geoffrey had no brandy, but he broke the neck off a bottle of his best substitute, and Savine lay very still in a canvas lounge gripping one of its rails hard for long anxious minutes before he said, "It is over, and I am myself again. Hope I didn't scare you!"

"I was uneasy," said Thurstan. "Dare I ask, sir, what the seizure was?" and Savine, who had evidently not quite recovered yet, looked steadily at the speaker. "I'll tell you in confidence, but neither my daughter nor my rivals must at present hear of this," he said at length. "It is part of the price I paid for success. An affection of the heart, which may snuff me out at any moment, or leave me years of carefully-guarded life."

"I don't quite understand, sir, but perhaps I ought to suggest that you sit still and keep quiet for a time," said Geoffrey, and Savine answered, "No. Save for a slight faintness I am as well as—I usually am. When one gets more than his due share of this world's good things he must generally pay for it—see? If you don't, remember as an axiom that one can buy success too dearly. Meantime, and to come back to this question's every-day aspect, I want your promise to say nothing of what you have seen. Helen must be spared anxiety, and I must still pose as a man without a weakness, whatever it costs me."

"You have it, sir!" said Geoffrey, and Savine, who nodded, seemed satisfied.

## Savine's Confidence

"As I said before, I can trust you, Thurstan, and though I've troops of interested friends I'm a somewhat lonely man. Don't know why I should tell you this, it isn't quite like me, but the seizure shook me, and I just feel that way. Besides, in return for your promise I owe you the confidence. Was the weakness born in me? I don't think so. Give me some more wine, and I'll try to tell you.

"I won my dollars hardly; started life as a bridge carpenter, and starved myself to buy the best textbooks," Savine continued presently. "Bid always for something better than what I had, and generally got it; ran through a big bridge-building contract at twenty-five, and fell in love with my daughter's mother when I'd finished it. I had risen at a bound from working foreman—she was the daughter of one of the proudest poverty-stricken Frenchmen in old Quebec. Well, it would make a long story, but I married her, and she taught me much worth knowing, besides helping me on until, when I had all my savings locked up in apparently profitless schemes, I tendered for a great bridge contract. I also got it, but there was political jobbery, and the opposition, learning from my rival how I was fixed, required a big surety deposit before the agreement was signed."

Savine paused a full minute, and helped himself to more wine before he proceeded. "The deposit was to be paid in fourteen days from the time I got the notice, or the tender would be advertised for again, and I hadn't half the dollars handy, couldn't realise on my possessions without an appalling loss, but I swore I would hold on to that contract, and I did it. It was always my way to pick up any odd information I could, and I learned that a certain mining shaft was likely to strike high-pay ore shortly. I got the information from a workman who left it to serve me, so I caught the first train, made a long journey, then rode over a bad pass to get there. How I dealt with the manager don't greatly matter, but though I neither bribed nor threatened him he showed me

## His Master Purpose

what I wanted to see. Rode back over pass and down moraine through blinding snow, went on without rest or sleep to the city, borrowed what I could—I wasn't so well known then, and it was mighty little—and bought up as much of that mine's stock on margins as the money would cover. The news was being held back, but other men were buying quietly. Still—well, they must sleep and get their dinners, and I, who could do without either, came out ahead of them. Market went mad in a day or two over the news of the crushing. I sold out at a tremendous premium, and started by special loco to pay my deposit. Did it in person, came back with the sealed contract—hadn't eaten decently or slept more than a few hours in two anxious weeks—went home triumphant, and collapsed—as I did not long ago—while I told my wife."

There was silence for several minutes inside the tent when Savine had finished, while the clang of hammer and shovel continued without. Then Geoffrey said, "I thank you for your confidence, sir, and will respect it. But even yet I am not quite certain why, considering that you held my unconditional promise, you gave it me."

"As I said already, because I just felt like it," answered Savine. "Still, there's generally a common-sense reason somewhere for what I do, and it may help you to understand me. I heard of you at your first beginning, and I figured you were taking hold as I had done before you; thought I might have some use for a man like you. I'll perhaps tell you more, if we both live long enough, some day."

It was in the cool of the evening that Savine and his daughter rode back towards the railroad, leaving Geoffrey puzzled at the uncertain ways of women, and while the garish sunset faded behind the black pines on a ridge ahead, the engineer said,—

"What do you think of my new assistant Helen? You have generally a quick judgment, and you haven't told me yet."




## Savine's Confidence

"I hardly know," was the answer. "He is certainly a man of strong character, but there is something about him which repels one—something harsh, almost sinister, though this would, of course, in no way affect his business relations with you. For instance, you saw how he lives, and yet he not only turned away, but spoke very cutting words to a countryman of his own, who appeared destitute and hungry."

Savine laughed. "You did not see how he lived. The good things in his tent were part of his business property, handy when some mining manager, who may want work done, comes along—or perhaps brought in by mounted messenger for Miss Savine's special benefit. Thurstan lives on pork and potatoes, and eats them with his men. Seldom touches wine except in high-grade company, and the fellow you pitied was a waster. It mayn't greatly matter to you or me, but that man will do great things some day."

"It is perhaps possible," said Helen. "The hard kind are usually successful, but you have rather a weakness, father, for growing enthusiastic over what you call a live assistant now and then. You have sometimes been mistaken in them."



## CHAPTER X

### AN INSPIRATION

MORE than twelve months had passed since Thurstan's first visit to High Maples, when he stood one morning gazing abstractedly down a misty valley. Below him a small army of men were toiling upon the huge earth embankments, which, half-hidden by thin haze, divided the river from the broad swamps behind it, but Geoffrey scarcely saw them. He was looking back upon the events of the past year, and oblivious for a few moments to the busy present. Geoffrey had made rapid progress in his profession and the esteem of Julius Savine during the time, but he felt very uncertain as to how far he had succeeded in winning that of the latter's daughter. On some of his brief visits to High Maples Helen had treated him with a kindness which sent him away exultant.

During others, however, she appeared to avoid his company, and presently dismissing the recollections with a sigh, he glanced at the strip of paper in his hand. It was a telegraphic message from her father, and ran,—

“Want you and all the ideas you can bring along at the chalet to-morrow. Expect deputation and interesting evening.”

Savine had undertaken the drainage of the wide valley which the rising waters periodically turned into a morass, and had sublet Geoffrey a part of the work. The neighbouring ranchers who would

## An Inspiration

benefit had each promised a pro-rata payment, and the Crown authorities had conditionally granted him a percentage of all the unoccupied land he could reclaim. Operations had not, however, hitherto proved successful, for the snow-fed river breached the dykes, and the leaders of a syndicate with an opposition scheme were not only sowing distrust among Savine's supporters, but striving to stir up political controversy over the concession.

Geoffrey did not agree with the contractor on several important points, but deferred to the older man's judgment. He had, however, already made his mark, and could have obtained profitable commissions from both mining companies and the smaller municipalities had he desired them.

Presently the mists commenced to melt before a warm breeze from the Pacific. Sliding in filmy wisps athwart the climbing pines they rolled clear of the river, leaving bare two huge parallel mounds, between which its turbid waters ran, and a waste of tall harsh grasses stretching back to the edge of the encircling forest. Geoffrey, surveying it, knew that, because most of the province is cumbered with barren rock and mighty conifers, while provisions must be imported to feed its mining population, a rich reward awaited the man who could reclaim that swamp. He was reminded of his first venture, which was, however, insignificant compared to this, and to strengthen the resemblance the last white wisps vanishing revealed a wide blue lake at one end of the valley and at the other a tremendous gash in the range side, down which the river thundered.

Then the watcher clenched his hands, for, suddenly as the mists had melted, the uncertainty in his own mind as to Savine's plan vanished too, and he saw that the contractor was wrong. What he had done for rancher Bransome on a minute scale must be done here on a gigantic one. A bold man, backed with capital, might blast a pathway for the waters through the converging rocks of the cañon, and, with-



## His Master Purpose

out the need of costly dykes, both swamp and lake would be left dry land. He stood rigidly still for ten long minutes while his heart beat fast, then strode hurriedly towards the gap in the ranges. There was much to do before he could obey Savine's summons.

It was towards the close of that afternoon when Julius Savine lounged on the verandah of a wooden hotel built for the comfort of Eastern tourists in a gorge of savage beauty. In spite of all that modern art could do, the building looked raw and new, out of place among the immemorial pines climbing towards snowy heights unsullied since the beginning by the foot of man, and more in keeping with the litter of empty provision cans, reek of kerosene, and other evidences of Western progress along the steel track which wound down from the passes into the forests below. Helen, who sat near, glanced at her father keenly before she said,—

"You have not looked well all day. Is it the hot weather, or are you troubled about the conference to-night?"

Savine at first said nothing, though the furrows deepened on his forehead, and Helen felt a thrill of anxiety as she watched him. She had noticed that his shoulders were losing their squareness, and his face had grown thin of late. Perhaps the man saw the anxiety in her gaze, for presently he answered with a reassuring gesture,—

"I must look worse than I feel; but, though there is nothing to worry about, the reclamation scheme is a big one, and some of my rancher friends seem to have grown lukewarm latterly. If they went over to the opposition the plea that my workings might damage their property would, if backed by meddlesome politicians, seriously hamper me. Still, I shall certainly convince them, and that is why I am receiving the deputation to-night. I wish Thurstan had come in earlier; I want to consult with him."

## An Inspiration

"What has happened to you?" said Helen, laying her hand affectionately upon his arm. "You never used to listen to anybody's opinions, and now you are always consulting Thurstan. Sometimes I fancy you ought to give up your business before it wears you out. After all, you have not known Thurstan long."

"Perhaps so;" and when Savine looked at her Helen became interested in an eagle which hung poised on broad wings above the valley. "I feel older than I used to, and may quit business when I put this contract through. It is big enough to wind up with. If I'd known Thurstan for ages I couldn't be more sure of him. I am a little disappointed that you don't like him."

"You go too far," and Helen still concentrated her attention upon the dusky speck against the blue. "I have no reason for disliking Mr Thurstan; indeed, I do not do so, and it may be mere jealousy. You give —him—most of your confidences now, and I should hate anybody who divided you from me."

Savine lifted her little hand into his own, and patted it playfully as he answered, "You need never fear that. Helen, you are very like your mother as she was thirty years ago."

There was a sparkle of indignation in Helen's eyes, and a suspicion of tell-tale colour in her face. She remembered that when he first met her mother her father's relative position much resembled Thurstan's, and the girl wondered if he desired to remind her of it.

"The cars are in sight. Perhaps I had better see if the hotel people are ready for your guests," she said with indifference.

That hotel was famous for its cuisine, and the dinner which followed was for various reasons a memorable one, though some of the guests appeared distinctly puzzled by the sequence of viands and liquors. Still, even those who, appreciating the change from leathery venison and grindstone bread, had

## His Master Purpose

filled up at the first course, struggled manfully with the rest, and good fellowship reigned until the cloth was removed, and the party prepared to discuss business. Savine sat at the head of the table, the grey now showing thick in his hair, with perhaps too languid an expression, for one of those present whispered that the daring engineer was not what he used to be. The whisperer also glanced at Thurstan, who sat, stalwart, keen, and determined of face, beside his chief, with a big, hard hand upon the table, and added, "I know which I'd sooner run up against now; and it wouldn't be his deputy, sub-contractor, or whatever the fellow is."

"Finding that our correspondence was using up no end of time and ink, I figured it would be better to us to talk things over together comfortably, and as some of you come from Vancouver, and some from round the lake, this place appeared a convenient centre," commenced Savine. "Now, gentlemen, while I'm open to discuss either business or anything else you like, I might suggest the former to begin with."

There was a murmur, and the guests looked at one another. They were a somewhat mixed company—several speculators from the cities, two credited with political influence; well-educated Englishmen, who had purchased land in the hope of combining sport with cattle raising; and wiry axemen, who lived hardly while they drove their clearings further into the forest, field by field.

"Then I'll start right off," said a city man. "I bought land up yonder and signed papers backing you. Thought there would be a boom in the valley when you got through, but I've heard some talk lately to the effect that the river is going to beat you, and, in any case, you're making head slow. What I, what we all, want to know is, when you're going to have the undertaking completed?"

Applause and a whispering followed, and another man said, "Our sentiments exactly! Guess you've seen *The Freespeaker's* article?"

## An Inspiration

"I have," said Savine, coolly. "It suggested that I have no intention of carrying out my agreement, but hoodwinked the authorities for some indefinite purpose mysteriously connected with maintaining our present provincial rulers in power. The thing's absurd on the face of it, when I'm spending my dollars like water, and you ought to know me better. I won't even get the comparatively insignificant bonus until the work is finished."

Several of the listeners rapped upon the table, one or two growled suspiciously, and a big sunburnt Englishman stood up. "We'll let the article in question pass," he said. "It is clearly written with personal animus. As you say, we know you better; but see here, Savine, this is going to be a serious business for us if you fail. We've helped you with free labour, hauled your timber in, lent you oxen, and, in fact, done almost everything, besides by giving you our bonds for a good many dollars and signing full approval of your scheme. By doing this we have barred ourselves from encouraging the other fellows' one."

Then, after similar but less complimentary speeches had been made, Thurstan, who had been whispering to Savine, stood up and swept a searching glance round the assembly. "Any sensible man could see that the opposition scheme is impracticable. I am afraid some of you have been sent here well primed," he said.

Perhaps it was combatant rashness, or possibly a premeditated attempt to force the listeners to reveal their actual sentiments. If the latter, it was successful, for several men commenced to speak at once, and while disjointed words interpolated his remarks, the loudest of them said, "You can't fool us, Savine. We're poor men with a living to earn, but we're mighty tough, and nobody walks over us with nails in their boots. If you can't hold up that river, where are we going to be? and I'd sooner shove in the giant powder to blow them up, than stand by and see my

## His Master Purpose

crops and cattle washed out when your big dykes bust."

"So would I," cried several voices, and there was a rapid cross-fire of question and comment. "Not the men to be fooled with." "Stand by our rights; appeal to the legislation, and choke this thing right up!" "Can you make your dykes stand water at all?" "Give the man—a fair show." "How many years do you figure on keeping us waiting?"

Savine rose somewhat stiffly from his chair, and Thurstan noted an ominous greyness in either cheek.

"There are just two things you can do," he said; "Appeal to your legislators to get my grants cancelled, or sit tight and trust me. For thirty-five years I've done my share in the development of the Dominion, and I never took a contract I didn't put through. This has proved a tough one, but if it costs me my last dollar—"

The honest among the malcontents were mostly struggling men, who, having expected the operations would bring them swift prosperity, had been the more disappointed. Still, the speaker's sincerity inspired returning confidence, and, when he paused with a shiver, a measure of sympathy for Savine, who seemed haggard and ill, and was one against many. They began to wonder whether they had not been too impatient and suspicious, and one broke in apologetically, "That's good! We're not unreasonable. But we like straight talking—how if the dykes keep on busting?"

Then there was consternation, for Savine, who seemed to shrink together, collapsed into his chair, saying, "Mr Thurstan will tell you. Remember he acts for me. Don't feel as well as I might do. Help me out, and then go back to them, Geoffrey."

"Sit still. Stand back! You have done rather too much already," said Geoffrey, turning fiercely upon the men, who hurried forward, one with a water decanter, and the other with a wineglass. "Now lean upon me, sir!"

## An Inspiration

The others fell back before him, and he led Savine, who leaned heavily upon him, from the room, while just as they entered a smaller one Helen and her aunt passed along the verandah it opened into.

"They must not know; keep them out!" gasped the contractor. "Get me some brandy and ring for that steward man—quick. You have got to go back and convince those fellows, Thurstan. Good Lord!—this is agony."

Savine sank into a chair, and the fading glow of the sunset showed that his twitching face was livid, and great beads of moisture dewed his forehead. Thurstan pressed a button, then strode swiftly towards the door hoping that Helen, who passed outside with a laugh upon her lips, might be spared the sight. He would have been successful, but that Mrs Savine, gazing in through the long window, started as she said, "Helen, your father's very sick. Run along and bring me the elixir out of my valise."

Helen turned towards the window, and Geoffrey, who groaned inwardly, placed himself so that she could not see. Then there was a rustle of fabric, and swift, light footsteps approached the door, which swung partly open before he could reach it, while when he laid his hand on its edge, Helen stood revealed in the aperture. Her eyes were wide with apprehension, and she quivered with impatience.

"What is the matter? Why do you stand there? Let me pass at once!" she said.

"Please wait a few moments," answered Geoffrey. "Your father will be better directly, and you must not excite him."

There was no mistaking the colour in Helen's face now. If her eyes were anxious the crimson in her cheeks and on her forehead was that of anger, and Geoffrey felt compassionate, but still determined to spare her.

"For your father's sake and your own, don't go in just yet, Miss Savine," he said again; but, with little fingers whose grip felt steely, the girl

## His Master Purpose

wrenched away his arm, and, seeing nothing but force would avail, Geoffrey let it fall.

"Is there no limit to your interference or presumption?" she said, sweeping past him to hang with a low cry over her father's chair, and that cry pierced Thurstan through. Helen had seen little of either sickness or tragedy, and Savine sat still as though he did not see her, his face contracted into a ghastly grin of pain. Meantime Geoffrey, resolving that at least the sick man should not have the elixir inflicted upon him in his agony, locked the door against the entrance of Mrs Savine. The attendant, who came in by another, was evidently a capable man, for he reappeared in a few seconds with some cordial, and deftly aided Geoffrey to force a little between the sufferer's teeth. Still, besides choking for breath, Savine made no sign, and Thurstan fancied he could hear Helen's heart thumping, while the laces at the breast of her light dress rose and fell very close beside him. Forgetting her indignation in her terror she glanced at him in vague question, but Geoffrey only raised his hand with a restraining gesture.

"We had better get him on to a sofa, sir," whispered the attendant, presently. "Not very heavy. Perhaps you and I could manage." It was then that Savine first showed signs of intelligence. He glanced at Geoffrey, attempted to beckon towards the room they had left, and when he seemed slightly better Thurstan, said,—

"I am going, sir. Stay here a few minutes, and then call somebody, waiter. I cannot stay any longer."

Savine made an approving gesture, pointing to the door again, but Helen said with fear and evident surprise, "You will not leave us now, Mr Thurstan?"

"I must," answered Geoffrey, restraining an intense longing to stay since she desired it, but loyal to his master's charge. "I believe your father is recovering, and it is his especial wish. I can do nothing, and he only needs quietness."

## An Inspiration

Helen said nothing further, but, dropping on one knee, chafed her father's hand, while Thurstan went back, pale and very grim, to the head of the long table.

"Mr Savine was seized by a passing faintness, but is apparently recovering," he said. "Nevertheless, he may not be able to return, and being interested with him in the drainage scheme he has appointed me his deputy. Therefore, in brief answer to your questions, I would say that if both or either of us live we will give you good oat fields instead of swamp grass and muskeg. It is a solemn promise—we intend to redeem it."

"I want to ask just two questions," said a sun-bronzed man, in picturesque jacket of fringed deer-skin. "Who are the—we; and how you're going to build dykes strong enough to stand the river when the lake's full of melting snow and sends her down roaring under a twenty-foot head?"

The speaker had touched the one weak spot in Savine's scheme, but Geoffrey rose to the occasion, and there was a wondering hush when he said, "In answer to the first—Julius Savine and I. Secondly, we will, if necessary, obliterate the lake. It can be done."

The boldness of the answer from a comparatively unknown man held the listeners still until there were further questions, and finally, amid acclamation, one of the party said, "Then it's a bargain, and we'll back you solid through thick and thin. Isn't that so, gentlemen? If the opposition try to make legal trouble, as the holders of the cleared land likely to be affected we've got the strongest pull. We came here doubting; you have convinced us."

"I hardly think you will regret it," said Geoffrey, quietly. "Now, as I must see to Mr Savine, you will excuse me."

Savine lay with a drawn face breathing heavily when Geoffrey rejoined him, but he demanded to know what had happened, and nodded approval when told. Then Geoffrey withdrew, beckoning to Helen, who rose and followed him.



## His Master Purpose

"This is no time for useless recrimination, or I would ask how you could leave one who has been a generous friend helpless and suffering," she said. "My father is evidently seriously ill, and you are the only person I can turn to, for the hotel manager tells me there is no doctor within miles of us. So in my distress I must stoop to ask you, for his sake, what I can do?"

"Will you believe not only that I sympathise, but that I would gladly have given all I possess to save you from this shock?" Thurstan commenced, but Helen cut him short by an impatient gesture, and stood close beside him with distress and displeasure in her eyes, and her fingers twitching nervously.

"All that is beside the question—what can we do?"

"Only one thing," answered Geoffrey. "Bring up the best doctor in Vancouver by special locomotive, and as there's no train until to-morrow I'm going now to hold the fast freight up. Gather your courage. I will be back soon after daylight with skilled assistance."

He went out before the girl could answer, and Helen hurried back to her father's side comforted. Whatever his failings might be, and she said to herself that she could hardly forgive him, Thurstan was at least a man to depend upon when there was need of action.

There was a little platform near the hotel where trains might be flagged for the benefit of passengers, but the office was locked. Thurstan, who knew that shortly a great freight train would pass, broke in the window, and, for it was darkening fast, borrowed a lantern, lighted it, and hurried up the track which here wound round a curve through the forest and over a trestle. Now, it is not pleasant to cross a lofty trestle bridge on foot in broad daylight, for one must step from sleeper to sleeper over wide spaces with empty air beneath, and, as the ties are just wide enough to carry the single pair of metals,



## An Inspiration

it would mean destruction to meet a train. Geoffrey nevertheless pressed on fast, the light of the blinking lantern dazzling his eyes, and rendering it more difficult to judge the distances between the ties, until he halted for breath a moment in the centre of the bridge. White mist and the roar of hurrying water rose out of the chasm beneath, but another sound broke through it, the vibratory rattle of freight cars racing down the valley, and he went on again at a reckless run, leaping across black gulfs of shadow.

The sound had gained in volume when he reached firm earth and ran his hardest towards the end of the curve, from which the locomotive engineer could see his lantern down a long declivity, then halted, panting, holding it aloft as a great fan-shaped blaze of radiance came flaming like a comet down the track.

It was the light of a big head-lamp, and presently he could dimly discern the shape of two huge mountain engines behind it, while the metals trembled beside him, and a wall of rock flung back the din of whirling wheels. The fast freight had started from the head of Atlantic navigation at Montreal, and would not stop until the huge cars rolled alongside the Empress liner at Vancouver, for part of their burden was being hurried West from England round half the world to China and the East again. The track led down-grade, and the engineers, who had nursed the great machines up the long climb to the summit, were now racing them their hardest down hill, swathed about in wind-cut smoke and blown down steam.

Geoffrey stood with one foot on the rail, and every sense intent, waving the lantern, until the first engine's cow-catcher was almost upon him, then leapt for his life and stood half-blinded amid whirling ballast and a rushing blast, as, veiled in thick dust, the great box cars clanged by. He was savage with dismay, for it seemed that the engineer had not seen his signal; then his heart bounded, for a shrill hoot from two whistles was followed by the screaming of brakes.

## His Master Purpose

When he came up with the standing train at the end of the trestle, one engineer, leaning down from the rail of the cab, said,—

"Saw your light away back, but was too busy trying to check her without smashing something to answer. Say, has the trestle caved in, or what in the name of thunder is holding us up?"

"The trestle is all right," answered Geoffrey, climbing into the cab. "I held you up, and I'm going on with you to bring out a doctor to my partner, who is dangerously ill."

The engineer's comments were indignant and sulphurous, while the big fireman turned back his shirt sleeves as if preparatory to personally chastising the rash interferer with express freight traffic, but Geoffrey, reaching for a shovel, said,—

"When we get there, I'll go with you to your superintendent at Vancouver, but if you either try to eject me or call assistance I'll make good use of this. I tell you it's a question of life and death, and two at least of your directors are good friends of the man I want to help. They wouldn't thank you for destroying his last chance. Meantime you're wasting precious moments. Open her out again."

"Hold fast!" said the grizzled engineer, opening the throttle. "When she's under way, I'll talk to you, and unless you satisfy me, by the time we reach Vancouver there won't be much of you left for the police to take charge of."

Then with loud blasts from their funnels, the two locomotives started the long cars on their inter-ocean race again.

## CHAPTER XI

### GEOFFREY TESTS HIS FATE

IT was a lowering afternoon in the Fall, when Thurstan and Julius Savine stood talking together upon a spray-drenched ledge in the depths of a British Columbian cañon. On the crest of the smooth-scarped hillside, which stretched back from the sheer face of rock far overhead, stood what looked like a tiny fretwork in ebony, and consisted of two-hundred-foot conifers. Here and there a clamorous torrent had worn out a gully, and, with Thurstan's assistance, Savine had accomplished the descent down one of the less precipitous. Elsewhere the rocks had been rubbed into smooth and absolutely unclimbable walls, between which the river had fretted out its channel during countless ages. It was coming down in a mad green flood, for the higher snows had melted fast under the autumn sun, and the clay beneath the glaciers had stained it with its colouring. Foam licked the ledges, a roaring white wake streamed behind each boulder's ugly head, and the whole gloomy cañon rang with the thunder of a rapid, whose filmy steam whirled in the chilly breeze.

Savine gazed at the rapid and whirlpool that fed it, distinguishing the roar of scoring gravel and grind of broken rock from its vibratory booming, and though he was, or at least had been, a daring man, his heart almost failed him.

"It looks ugly, horribly ugly, and I doubt if another man in the Dominion would have suggested tackling the river here, but you are right," he said.

## His Master Purpose

"Human judgment has its limits, and the constant bursts have proved that no dykes which wouldn't ruin me in the building could stand high-water pressure long. If you don't mind, Thurstan, we'll move farther from the edge. I've been a little shaky since that last attack."

"The climb down was awkward, but you have looked better lately, sir," said Geoffrey, and Savine sighed.

"I guess my best days are done, and that is one reason why I wish to end up with a big success," he said. "I got a plain warning from the Vancouver doctor you brought me in that morning. You managed it smartly."

"I was lucky," said Thurstan, laughing. "At first I fancied I should have been ignominiously locked up after the engineer and fireman had torn my clothes off me. But we hardly climbed down here to talk of that."

"No!" and Savine looked straight at his companion. "This is a great scheme, Thurstan, the biggest I have ever undertaken. There will be room for scores of ranches, herds of cattle, wheat fields and orchards, if we can put it through—and we have just got to put it through. Those confounded dykes have drained me heavily, and they'll keep right on costing money. Still, even to me, it looks almost beyond the power of mortal man to deepen the channel here. The risk will figure high in dollars, but higher in human life. You feel quite certain you can do it?"

"Yes!" said Geoffrey, simply. "I believe I can—in winter, when the frost binds the glaciers and the waters shrink. Once it is done, and the only hard rock barrier that holds the water up removed, the river will scour its own way through the alluvial. I have asked a long price, but the work will be difficult."

Savine nodded. He knew that it would be a task almost fit for demi-gods or giants to cut down the bed of what was a furious torrent, thick with grind-

## Geoffrey Tests His Fate

ing débris and scoring ice, and that only very strong bold men could grapple with the angry waters, amid blinding snow or under the bitter frost of the inland ranges in winter time.

"The price is not too heavy, but I don't accept your terms," he said. "Hold on until I have finished and then begin your talking. I'll offer you a minor partnership in my business instead. Take time, and keep your answer until I explain things in my offices in case you find the terms onerous, but there are many men in this country who would be glad of the chance you're getting."

Geoffrey stood up, his lean brown face twitching, walked twice along the slippery ledge, and then halted before Savine, saying, "I will accept them whatever they are on one condition, which I hardly dare hope you will approve of. That is, regarding the partnership, for in any case, holding to my first suggestion, you can count on my best help down here. I don't forget I owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, sir, though as you know I have had several good offers latterly."

Thurstan ceased, and Savine, who had been abstractedly watching the mad rush of current, looked up as he said, "What is the condition? You seem unusually diffident to-day, Thurstan."

"It is a great thing I am going to ask," but Geoffrey, standing on the treacherous ledge above the thundering river, scarcely looked like a suppliant as he put his fate to the test. "Your permission to ask Miss Savine to marry me when the time seems opportune. It would not be surprising if you laughed at me, but even then I should only wait the more patiently. This is not a new ambition, for one day when I first came, a poor man, into this country I set my heart upon it, and working ever since to realise it, I have, so far at least as worldly prospects go, lessened the distance between us."

Savine, who betrayed no surprise, was silent for a space, and then answered quietly, "I am, according

## His Master Purpose

to popular opinion, anything but a poor man, and though those dykes have bled me, such a match would, as you suggest, be unequal from a financial point of view, unless Helen marries against my wishes. Then she would marry without a dollar. Does that influence you?"

Thurstan spread out his hands with a contemptuous gesture, which his quiet earnestness redeemed from being theatrical. "For my own sake I should prefer it so. Dollars! How far would anyone count dollars in comparison with Miss Savine? But I do not fear being able to earn all she needs. When the time seems opportune the inequality may be less."

"It is possible," continued Savine. "One notices that the man who knows exactly what he wants and doesn't fool his time away over other things not infrequently gets it. You have not quite surprised me. Now—and I want a straight answer—why did you leave the Old Country?"

"For several reasons. I lost my money mining. The lady I should have married, according to arrangements made for us, tired of me. It is a somewhat painful story, but I was bound up in the mine, and there were, no doubt, ample excuses for her. We were both of us almost too young to know our own minds when we fell in with our relatives' wishes, and though I hardly care to say so, it was perhaps well we found out our mistake in time."

"Ah!" said Savine. "Were there no openings for a live man in the Old Country, and have you told me all?"

"I could not find any," and Geoffrey let the words fall slowly. "I come of a reckless, hard-living family, and feared that some of their failings might repeat themselves in me. I had my warnings. Had I stayed over there, a disappointed man, they might have mastered me, and so, when there was nothing to keep me, I turned my back—and ran. Out here any man who hungers for it can find quite sufficient

## Geoffrey Tests His Fate

healthful excitement for his needs, and excitement is as wine to me. These, I know, seem very curious qualifications for a son-in-law, but it seemed just to tell you. Need I explain further?"

"No," said Savine, whose face had grown serious. "Thanks for your honesty. I guess I know the weaknesses you mean—the greatest of them is whisky. I've had scores of brilliant men it has driven out from Europe shovelling dirt for me. It's not good news, Thurstan. How long have you made head against them?"

"Since I could understand things clearly," was the steady answer. "I only feared what might happen, and would never have spoken had I not felt that this country had, as it were, helped me to break the entail, and set me free. You know all, sir, and to my disadvantage I have put it before you tersely, but there is another aspect."

Thurstan's tone carried conviction with it, but Savine, who cut him short, saying, "It is the practical aspect that appeals to me," stared down at the river for several minutes before he asked again, "Have you any reason to believe that Helen reciprocates the attachment?"

"No," and Geoffrey's face fell. "Once or twice I ventured almost to hope so; more often I feared the opposite. All I ask is the right to wait until the time seems ripe, and know that I shall have your good will if it ever does. I could accept no further benefits from your hands until I had told you."

"You have it now," said Savine very gravely. "As you know, my life is uncertain, and I believe you faithful and strong enough to take care of Helen. After all, what could I look for more? Still, if she does not like you, there will be an end of the matter, if I know Helen Savine. It may be many would blame me for yielding, but I believe I could trust you, Thurstan—and there are things they do not know."

Savine sighed after the last words, and his face





## His Master Purpose

grew clouded; then he added abruptly, "Speak when it suits you, Thurstan, and good luck to you. There are reasons beside the fact that I'm an old man why I should envy you."

Had Geoffrey been less exultant he might have noticed something curious in Savine's expression, but he was too filled with satisfaction to be conscious of more than the one all-important fact that Helen's father wished him well, and it was in this mood he assisted the latter during the arduous scramble up out of the cañon. Later his elation became clouded by the recollection that he had yet to win the good will of Miss Savine, which promised to be considerably more difficult.

Some time had passed since the interview in the cañon, when one afternoon Geoffrey walked into the verandah at High Maples in search of Helen Savine. It was winter time, but the climate near the southwestern coast is mild. High Maples was also sheltered, and the sun was faintly warm. There were even a few hardy flowers in the borders fringing the smooth green lawn, a striking contrast to the snow-sheeted pines of the ice-bound wilderness he toiled in. Helen was not there, and not knowing where to search further, he sank somewhat heavily into a chair. Geoffrey had ridden all night through powdery drifts which rose at times to the stirrup, and at others so high that his horse could scarcely flounder through, made out lists of necessary stores as the jolting car sped on to Vancouver, and had been busy every moment until it was time to start for High Maples. Though he would fain have had it otherwise, he dare not neglect one item when time was very precious. Neither had he spared himself much leisure for either food or sleep of late, for by the short northern daylight, and flame of the roaring lucigen through the long black nights he and his company of carefully picked men had fought stubbornly with the icy river.

## Geoffrey Tests His Fate

The sun rays grew brighter, there was still no sign of Miss Savine, and tired in mind and body Geoffrey sat still, lost in a reverie. He had left the camp in a state of nervous suspense, but overtaxed nature had conquered, and now he waited none the less anxious, but with a physical languidness born of the reaction. Thus it happened that when Helen Savine came out softly through a long window Geoffrey did not at first see her, and she had time to cast more than a passing glance at him as he sat with head resting gratefully on the back of the basket chair. His face, blackened almost by the snow-blink, had grown once more worn and thin; there were lines upon the forehead and wrinkles about his eyes, while one bronzed hand lay above the other on his knee, as the complement of a pose that suggested the exhaustion of over fatigue. The sight roused her pity, and she felt unusually sympathetic towards the tired man.

Then Geoffrey started, rose sharply, and Helen noticed how he seemed to fling off his weariness as he came towards her, hat in hand.

"I have made a hurried journey to see you, Miss Savine," he said. "I have something to tell you, something I cannot keep silence over any longer. If I am abrupt you will forgive me, but will you listen a few moments, and then answer me a question?"

The man's tone was humble if his eyes were eager, and Helen, who was sensible of a tremor of emotion, leaned against the rails of the verandah. The winter sunlight shone full upon her, and perhaps either that or the cold breeze she had met on the headland accounted for the carmine warmth in either cheek. She also made a very dainty picture in neat fur cap and close-fitting jacket, whose rich fur trimming set off the curves of a very shapely figure, and the man's longing must have shown itself in his eyes, for Helen suddenly turned her own away from him. Again she felt a curious thrill, almost of pleasure, and

## His Master Purpose

wondered at it. If she had guessed his meaning correctly she should only feel sorry for him, and yet there was no mistaking an indefinite sense of satisfaction.

"Do you remember what I once told you at Graham's ranch?" he said. "I was a needy adventurer then, and guilty of horrible presumption, but though the words came without my definite will I meant every one of them. I knew there could be only one woman in the world for me, and I solemnly determined to win her. It seemed madness—I was a poor, unknown man—but the thought of you drove me resistlessly on until at last the gulf between us has been narrowed, and may be narrower still. That is, I have striven to lessen it in the one way I can—in all others without your help it must remain impassable. Heaven knows how far I am beneath you, and the daring hope has but one excuse—I love you, and shall always do so. Is what I hope for quite impossible?"

It was not the first time Helen, young as she was, had been asked such a question, though not quite in the same manner, but while she would have told herself ten minutes earlier that she almost disliked the pleader, she had never been conscious of the same sensations. They were also sensations she could not at the moment analyse. She had regarded other men, who graciously allowed her to see their preference, with amusement, and two declared suitors almost with contempt, but it was not so with Thurstan. Even if he occasionally repelled her, it was impossible to despise him.

"I am sorry," she said slowly. "Sorry that you should have told me this, because I can only answer that it is impossible."

Geoffrey evinced no great surprise. His face grew stern instead of expectant, his toil-hardened frame more erect, but he answered unusually gently, "I had endeavoured to prepare myself for your reply. How could I hope to win you—as it were for the

## Geoffrey Tests His Fate

asking—easily? Still, though I am painfully conscious of several reasons, may I venture to ask why it is impossible, Miss Savine?"

Helen realised with annoyance that her face and neck were hot, which had not happened on the last occasion, but she answered calmly, "I am sorry it is so—but why should I pain you? Can you not take my answer without the reasons?"

"No; not if you will give them," said the man. "I have grown accustomed to unpleasant things, and it is to be hoped there is truth in the belief that they are good for one. The truth from your lips would hurt me less. Will you not tell me?"

"I will try if you demand it;" and Helen, who could not help noticing how unflinchingly he had received what was nevertheless a heavy blow, hoped she was serene and lucid as she commenced, "I have a respect for you, Mr Thurstan, but—how shall I express it?—also a shrinking. You—please remember you insisted—seem so hard and overbearing, and while the latter is perhaps a natural quality in a man,—but will you force me to go on?"

"I would beg you," said Geoffrey, with a certain grimness.

"In spite of a popular fallacy, I could not esteem a—a husband I was afraid of, and a man should also be gentle, pitiful and considerate to all women. Without the mutual forbearance which follows these graces, there could be no true companionship—and—"

"You are right," and Geoffrey's voice was humble without bitterness. "I have lived a hard life, and perhaps it has made me, as compared with your standard, brutal. Still, I would ask again, are these all your reasons? Is the other difference between us too great—the distance dividing the man you gave the dollar to from the daughter of Julius Savine?"

"No," said Helen. "That difference is after all, imaginary. We do not think over here quite as you do in England, and if we did, are you not a Thurstan

## His Master Purpose

of Crosbie? But please believe that I am sorry, and—you insisted on the explanation—forgive me if I have said too much. There is a long future before you—and men change their minds."

Geoffrey's face darkened, and Helen, who regretted the last hasty words which escaped her without reflection, nevertheless watched him intently until he said, "Musker must have told you. The reverse was rather what happened, and though the fault was doubtless mine, that is a story which cannot be raked up again, Miss Savine."

"I had never meant to refer to it," said Helen with some confusion. "But since you have mistaken me, I must add that another friend of yours—a lady—gave me a version that bore truth stamped upon the face of it. One could fancy that you would not take kindly to the fate others arranged for you. But how do you know you are not repeating the same mistake? The fancy which deceived you then may do the same again."

"How do I know?" and Geoffrey's voice rang sonorously as he turned upon the questioner, stretched out an arm towards her, and then dropped it swiftly. "I know what love is now, because you have taught me. Listen, Miss Savine, I am as the Almighty made me, a plain—and sometimes ill-tempered man, who would gladly lay his life down to save you sorrow, but if what you say divides us is all, so long as you remain Helen Savine I shall cling fast to my purpose and strive to prove myself worthy. Again, you were right—how could you be otherwise?—but I shall yet convince you that you need not shrink from me."

"Please forget the words, and it would be wiser to take a definite 'no' for answer," said Helen. "Why should this fancy spoil your life for you?"

"You cannot take all hope from me," said the man. "Would you suspect me of exaggerated sentiment if I said my life has been, and is, yours already, for it is true. Meantime, I will go back to the work that

## Geoffrey Tests His Fate

is best for me, merely adding that if ever there is either trouble or adversity in which I can aid you, though God forbid, for your sake, that should ever be so, you have only to send for me."


"I can at least sincerely wish you success in your great undertaking," said Helen, touched a little as she held out her hand, and was conscious of a faint disappointment, when, barely touching it, he turned hurriedly away. She watched him cross the lawn towards the stables, and then waited until a rapid thud of hoofs broke the silence of the woods.

"Gone, and I let him carry that hope away!" she said, still looking towards the forest with troubled eyes. "Yesterday I could never have done so, but yesterday has gone, and now—"

Helen did not finish, but as growing fainter, the beat of hoofs died away, glanced at the hand which for a moment had rested in his. "What has happened to me, and is he learning quickly or growing strangely timid?" she said.

Geoffrey almost rode over Julius Savine near the railroad depôt, and reined in his horse to say, "I have got my answer, sir, but do not feel beaten yet. Some unholy luck insists that all my affairs must be mixed with my daily business, and, because of what was said in the cañon, I must ask you, now of all times, to let me hold the option of that partnership or acceptance of the offer I made you until we vanquish the river."

He went off at a gallop as the cars rolled in, leaving Savine smiling drily after him.



## CHAPTER XII

### A TEST OF LOYALTY

It was during a brief respite from his task, which had been suspended, waiting the arrival of certain tools and material, that Thurstan accompanied Savine and his daughter to a semi-public gathering at the house of a man who was a power in the Mountain Province just outside Vancouver City. Politicians, land-speculators, railroad and shipping magnates were present with their wives and daughters, and most of them had a word for Savine or a glance of admiration for Helen, while the former moved among them chatting with the brilliancy which occasionally characterised him, and puzzled Thurstan. Savine, who had found time for study during a busy career, was a well-read man, but, except to those he knew best, as a rule somewhat reserved in speech.

Thurstan was rarely troubled by petty jealousies, but the homage all men paid Helen awoke an unpleasant apprehension within him. He did not know many of those present, and at length found himself alone, seated in a quiet corner, for the ground floor of the rambling, wood-built house consisted of various thinly-furnished rooms, some of which opened by archways into each other. He could see into the one most closely thronged, where Helen formed the centre of an admiring circle. There was no doubt that Miss Savine owed much to the race she sprang from on her mother's side. Dark beauty, grace of movement, and, when she chose to indulge in it, vivacious speech, all betokened a Latin extraction, while the slight haughtiness, which Thurstan fancied

## A Test of Loyalty

wonderfully became her, was the dowry of a line of autocratic landowners. That she was pleasant to look upon he had the convincing testimony of other men's admiration as well as his own senses, while now, when the distance between them was in some respects diminishing, she seemed even further away from him. He felt himself a very plain, unpolished man in her presence, and knew he would never shine in the light play of wit and satire which, he supposed, characterised the society she was fitted for. He also decided she had probably remained unmarried as yet because she could find no one equal to her standard, and feared he himself would come very far beneath it. It also appeared very doubtful if he could ever acquire the gentler virtues Helen had, on one memorable occasion, described. Nevertheless, his face grew set and his brows wrinkled down as he determined that, in the meantime, he could prove his loyalty in the manner that best suited him, by serving her father faithfully.

Just then a certain capitalist interested in industrial schemes, for whom Geoffrey had undertaken several commissions, halted before him.

"Hallo! Quite alone, Thurstan, and worrying over something as usual," he commenced, with Western brusqueness. "What has gone wrong? More of your dams burst up yonder? One would have fancied you would have found floundering round through the ice and snow up there more congenial than these frivolities. I'm not great on them either, but it's a matter of dollars and cents with me. You perhaps know a little about this mostly self-made—that's your British term, I think—company."

"Not so much as you do," said Geoffrey, drily. "Still, I have been wondering how some of them acquired their money. I understand they have sense enough to be proud of their small beginnings, but they do not furnish instructive details as to the precise manner in which they achieved their greatness."



## His Master Purpose

The capitalist, who was one of the class described, himself, laughed good-humouredly, and seated himself beside Thurstan.

"Well, how are you getting on up yonder in the valley?" he repeated, and Geoffrey's eyes expressed faint amusement as he answered,—

"As well as we expected, and if we had our difficulties you would hardly expect me to tell them to a director of the Industrial Enterprise Company."

"Perhaps not!" and the other smiled, for the Industrial Enterprise was the corporation which had opposed Savine's reclamation scheme. "Anyway, it's chiefly a speculation with me, and my colleagues run the Company without much of my assistance. But say, what's the matter with your respected chief? He has come right out of his shell to-night."

The speaker glanced towards Savine, who was surrounded by a group of well-known men listening with evident interest, as he continued, "I tell you, Thurstan, there's something uncanny about that man of late. However, knowing there's no use trying to fool you, I'll give you a fair warning and come straight to something I may as well say now as later. Savine will go down like a house of cards some day, and those who lean upon him will find it, in our language, frosty weather. Now, suppose we made you a fair offer, would you join us?"

A curt refusal trembled already upon Geoffrey's lips, when he reflected that, as soon as the work was finished, his relations with Savine would be drawn closer still, and in the meantime it was not advisable to give any hint to a possible enemy. So he answered, "I couldn't say until I heard what the offer is."

"You're a typical cold-blooded Britisher," said the other man. "I don't know either. Leave all details to the rest; but we've a secretary, who understands all about it, in this house to-night. We're half of us here on business directly or indirectly, and not for pleasure, so it's possible he may talk to you. But I

## A Test of Loyalty

see our hostess eyeing us, and it's time we walked along."

They moved forward together, and the lady they approached, beckoning Geoffrey, whom she had for some reason taken under her patronage, said, "There's a countrywoman of yours present, who doesn't know many of our people yet, I should like to present you to. She comes, I understand, from the same wilds which sheltered you. Mrs Leslie, this is a special *protégé* of mine, Mr Thurstan, who could give you all information about the mountains your husband talks of banishing you to for a space."

A handsome, tastefully-dressed woman turned more fully towards them, and for a moment Geoffrey stood still in blank astonishment, for probably most men would find it disconcerting to be brought, without warning, suddenly face to face with a woman, who had discarded them in a strange country.

"Mrs Henry Leslie! But you evidently know each other," said the hostess, whose quick eyes had noticed his startled expression.

Millicent had changed since the last time Geoffrey saw her. She had lost her fresh cream and rose prettiness, but had gained something in place of it, and though her pale blue eyes were too deeply sunk, her face had, so it seemed to him, acquired strength and dignity. She was, as he had always found her, perfectly equal to the occasion, and with a quick glance, which expressed appeal and warning, said, "We are not quite strangers. I knew Mr Thurstan in England."

They moved away together, and, whether by accident or otherwise, Geoffrey presently found himself standing with Millicent's hand upon his arm in a broad corridor out of which a long window opened into a sheltered scroll-work balcony. There was clear moonlight outside, and a wide vista of forest and sparkling sea, while near the sheltered inlets of that coast, when the breeze blows south-west

## His Master Purpose

from the Pacific, winter is often warmer than an English spring.

"A breath of fresh air would be delightful. It would be quiet out there, and I expect you have much to tell me," said Millicent, with quiet composure, and her companion wondered at himself. After the first shock of the surprise he was sensible of no particular indignation or emotion. It seemed as though any tenderness he had once felt for the speaker, or anger against her, was long since dead. There was little he cared to tell her, but prompted by some impulse which may have been mere curiosity, he picked up an Indian dressed skin which hung over the back of a screen, laid it across Millicent's shoulders, and drew the window open. When he partly closed it his companion sank gracefully into a basket chair, drawing forward the glossy fur until it enhanced the whiteness of her neck and lustre of her hair. Geoffrey leaned against the scroll-work balustrade looking gravely down upon her, where a shaft of radiance from the corridor beat into his face.

"This reminds one of other days," said the woman, with a sigh. "Still, had I known you were here, I should have dreaded to meet you. You have surely altered, Geoffrey. I should have expected reproaches from you, and now—"

"I am not in the least inclined to reproach you, only somewhat—startled," was the sober answer, and Geoffrey substituted the last word for another, which would have expressed his sentiments more correctly, in time. He was distinctly perplexed, for he had acquired a clearer perception of Millicent's character since he left England, and now felt almost indignant with himself for wondering what she wanted. Glancing at her face he was conscious of a certain pity as well as a vague distrust, for it was evident that Millicent's lot had not been over smooth or her health of the best, though the fact that she should recall those days in England jarred upon him.

## A Test of Loyalty

"It is a relief to learn that you are not angry, at least. What are you doing over here, Geoffrey?" said the woman.

"Reclaiming a valley from a river. Living up among the mountains in the snow," was the answer, and Millicent asked,—

"And you like it? You can find happiness in the hard life?"

"Better than anything I ever undertook before. Happiness is a somewhat indefinite term, and, perhaps because I have seldom found leisure to consider whether I am happy or not, the presumption is that I am at least contented."

Millicent sighed once more and her face grew sad, while Thurstan rebelled against an instinctive conviction that his companion knew a wistful expression became her and was calculated to appeal to a male observer.

"One could envy you!" she said softly, and Geoffrey, rising superior to all thoughts of the kind, felt only sincere pity.

"Have you not been happy in—Canada, Millicent?" he asked, and if the woman noticed how nearly he had avoided a blunder, which is distinctly probable, she at least made no sign.

"I can't resist the temptation to answer you frankly, Geoffrey," she said. "I have had severe trials, and some, I fear, have left their mark on me. There are experiences after which one is never quite the same. You heard of the financial disaster which overtook us? Yes? Black days followed it, but my husband has hopes of succeeding in this country, and that will brighten the future—indirectly even—for me."

"Ah!" said Geoffrey, somewhat grimly, for though he could forgive the woman now, he could not the man who had supplanted him. "For your sake, I hope he will."

Millicent glanced at him sideways, and, as though anxious to change the subject, asked, "Is it the Orchard Valley you are endeavouring to reclaim?"

## His Master Purpose

Yes. I might have guessed it. I have heard people say that the scheme of Mr Savine, if that is his name, is impracticable. It is characteristic of you, Geoffrey, to play out a losing game, but, with one's future at stake, is it wise?"

"I do not know that I was ever particularly remarkable for wisdom," said Geoffrey, with a dry smile. "The scheme in question is, however, by no means so impracticable as some folks consider."

"Then you still hope for success. Have you not failed in one or two of your efforts?" and though Millicent's voice was politely indifferent, a certain keenness in her eyes, which, strange to say, did not escape Geoffrey's notice, betrayed more than a casual interest. The man afterwards decided that the shock of the unexpected meeting had more effect upon him than he was immediately conscious of, rendering his perceptions unusually quick.

"That is the case," he answered, with a laugh. "My employer is, as you may have heard, a sanguine person, and has not hitherto been beaten."

"I hope he will not be in this instance," said Millicent, and it occurred to Geoffrey that she was concealing a sense of disappointment as she changed the conversation languidly until at last she said, "I am afraid we have both been shamefully neglecting our social duties, but as we shall, in all probability, meet now and then, I hope—in spite of all that has happened—it will be as good friends."

Again, though deciding that he was mistaken, the man felt that the meeting had not been brought about wholly by accident, but he bent his head answering, "If ever you should need a friend, you can, for the sake of old times, count on me."

"One of the finest views in the province," said a voice behind them. "We are proud of the prospect from this balcony. If you stand here, Miss Helen, you can enjoy it, and tell me if you have anything better at High Maples. Most romantic spot on such a night for a quiet chat, and if I was only twenty

## A Test of Loyalty

years younger, my dear young lady—" Then the speaker evidently retired with some precipitation from the window, as he added, "No, never mind drawing the curtain, Savine. If she is not over tired I can show your daughter something interesting in the conservatory instead."

"Romantic spot occupied already. It's just as well you're not," and the laugh which mingled with the retreating footsteps and rustle of drapery was unmistakably that of Julius Savine.

Meantime Geoffrey, who fumed inwardly at the reflection that his attitude was distinctly liable to misconception, straightened himself with perhaps too great suddenness, while the faint amusement in his companion's face heightened his displeasure. Millicent had managed to obtain a survey of the intruders, and when sure they had moved away, rose, saying, "So that is the beautiful Miss Savine! No doubt you have seen her, and, like all the rest, admire her?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "I can honestly say I do." Millicent regarded him curiously.

"You have heard that we seldom praise each other, and, therefore, while admitting that she is coldly handsome, I should imagine Miss Savine to be a trying person," she answered. "Now we must return to our respective duties. In my case, at least, no one could call them pleasures."

Some little time later Helen, whose eyes had kindled for a moment when her grey-haired escort led her towards the balcony, heard the bluff Canadian, who had left her since, answer a question. "Who was the lady? Can't exactly say. Her husband's Leslie, the Britisher, who started the land-agency offices, you will remember there was trouble about, and is now, I believe, secretary to the Industrial Enterprise. Frankly, I don't like the man—strikes me as a smart adventurer, and my wife does not take to the lady. If you want any further information you can apply to her. The man on the balcony was Thurstan,

## His Master Purpose

Savine's assistant and a good fellow. He generally follows humbly in Miss Savine's train, and, considering Leslie's connection with the rival company, I don't quite see what he could be doing in that galley."

Helen was piqued. She was too proud to admit to herself that she was jealous, but she had not risen superior to all the characteristics of her sex; and, knowing something of her father's business affairs, she was also puzzled. Thurstan's attitude towards his companion was not that of a casual acquaintance, to say the least, and Helen could not help wondering what his connection with the wife of one whose interests, she gathered, must be diametrically opposed to her father's, could be. Then, though endeavouring to decide that it did not matter, she determined to put Thurstan to the test on opportunity.

Meantime Geoffrey stood for a few minutes looking out into the moon-lit night alone. "I am growing brutally suspicious, and the poor soul has suffered—she can't well hide it," he said half-aloud. "Well, we were fond of each other once, and, whether it's her husband or adversity, whenever I can help her, I must try to do so."

It was the revolt of an open nature against the evidence of his senses, but even while Geoffrey framed this resolution something seemed to whisper, "Was she ever fond of you? There is that in the woman's voice which does not ring true."

He had hardly turned back to rejoin the rest again when a business acquaintance met him saying,—

"I want you to spare a few minutes for a countryman who has been inquiring about you. Leslie, this is Thurstan—the secretary of the Industrial Enterprise!"

The business acquaintance withdrew, and Geoffrey's lips set tight as he turned upon the man who had supplanted him, while Leslie betrayed a certain uneasiness in spite of his nonchalant attitude. He was a dark-haired man with a very pale face, which

## A Test of Loyalty

had grown more fleshy and sensual than Geoffrey remembered it.

"I don't know whether I should, in conventional language, say this is a pleasure," he commenced. "There is no use disguising that we last met under somewhat unfortunate circumstances, but I give you my word that it was too late to suggest my employers should choose another ambassador when I discovered your identity. Nevertheless, we can both of us, I hope, where commercial interests are concerned, rise superior to mere sentiment."

"There are things which it is uncommonly hard to forget, and certain sentiment still harder for most men to rise superior to. The question is, however, What do you want with me?" said Geoffrey, looking grimly down on the speaker with his hands behind him. He meant his tone and pose to be the reverse of conciliatory, and they certainly were so.

"The favour of a business interview before you return," said Leslie, trying to hide his discomfiture, and Geoffrey answered,—

"That is hardly possible. I return early to-morrow."

"Can you drive over to my quarters now?"

"No. I desire to see my chief before I go."

"It is confoundedly unfortunate," the other commented, apparently glad of some excuse for expressing his disgust. "Well, perhaps nobody will disturb us for a few minutes in yonder corridor. You can regard me as a servant of the Industrial Enterprise. Are you open to listen to what I have to say?"

"I'm open to listen to the great Company's secretary," said Geoffrey, with a bluntness under which the other winced, as he turned towards the corridor.

"I'll be brief," commenced Leslie. "The fact is, we want a capable man accustomed to the planning and construction of irrigation works, and two of our directors rather fancy you. He would have full control of practical operations, and I have a



## His Master Purpose

tolerably free hand in respect to financial conditions. The main thing we wish to discover is, are you willing to consider an offer of the position?"

It was on the surface a simple business proposition, but Thurstan's nostrils dilated and his brows came down, for he guessed what lay behind it, while just then Helen Savine passed, a radiant vision, it seemed to him, across the other end of the corridor.

"I've heard Savine is a liberal man," continued Leslie, who mistook his hesitation. "Still, considering your valuable experience in the Orchard Valley, I have power to outbid him. You certainly will not lose financially by throwing in your lot with us."

Then Thurstan's anger mastered him, and he flung prudence to the winds.

"Your employers have chosen a worthy messenger," he said, so fiercely that Leslie recoiled. "Did you suppose that I would sell my benefactor, for that is what it amounts to? Confusion to you and the rogues behind you! There's another score between us, and I feel greatly tempted to—"

He looked ready to yield to the unmentioned temptation. Leslie, glancing round anxiously, backed away from him, but, restraining himself with an effort, Thurstan stood fast, panting. Then there was a patter of approaching footsteps, and the secretary slipped away, leaving the irate engineer face to face with an amused elderly gentleman and Helen Savine. He did not know how much or how little they had seen, and was retiring when Helen beckoned him.

"My father has looked over tired during the last hour," she said aside. "I have been warned that excitement may prove dangerous, but hardly care to remind him of it. Would you, as a favour to me, persuade him to return home with you, on the plea of his engagement with you?"

There was no doubt of Thurstan's devotion, for Helen had eyes to see, and she sighed a little, but contentedly, when he hurried away. Nevertheless, she

## A Test of Loyalty

was still perplexed, for, shortly before, she had seen Mrs Leslie looking at him pleadingly, and now her husband shrank from before him with malice in his eyes. The woman was certainly attractive, and yet Helen fancied she knew Thurstan's character, and had seen—what she had seen—in his face. Meantime Geoffrey found Savine, who seemed to have suddenly collapsed as though the fire of brilliancy had burned itself out, by himself, and with more tact than he usually possessed, persuaded him to take his leave. Savine agreed, and, when Thurstan stood with them on the broad wooden steps promising to follow in a few minutes, Helen stretched out her hand to him, saying softly,—

"Thank you, Geoffrey. Believe me, I am grateful."

Thurstan quivered, standing bareheaded beside a pillar as they drove away. It was the first time Helen had called him Geoffrey, and he fancied he had seen even more than kindness in her eyes.

"And it is her father they tempted me to sell. Damn them!" he growled. "The only honest man among them included me among those who lean upon Savine! Savine will need a stay himself presently, and one, at least, will not fail him. Ah, again!—what the devil are you wanting?"

The last words were spoken clearly, but Leslie, to whom they were addressed, seeing several servants in the vicinity, smiled malevolently.

"It would pay you to be civil," he said. "I have no particular reason to love you, and might prove a troublesome enemy. However, because my financial interests, which are bound up with my masters', come first, I warn you that you are foolish to hold on to an employer, who has strong men against him, when his best days are over. I'll give you time to cool down and think over my suggestion."

"You and I can have no dealings," said Geoffrey. "What's done cannot be undone—but keep clear of me. As sure as there's a justice, which will bring you



## His Master Purpose

to book, even without my help, some day, we'll crush you if you get in my or Savine's way."

"I think this is hardly becoming to either of us, and the next time the Company want your views they can send another envoy," said Leslie, and Geoffrey answered grimly,—

"In the expressive Western idiom, it would save trouble if you keep on thinking in just that way."

Leslie retired, and about that time it happened that Savine, turning to his daughter, said, "Thurstan's a good fellow, and I hope he will follow soon. Helen, your father's getting old, and needs a younger man to help him. You have proof positive in the fact that he should make such a confession."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WORK OF AN ENEMY

IT was a bitter morning when a weary man, sprinkled white with powdery snow, came limping into Thurstan's camp, then pitched in the cañon. A pitiless wind swept down from the range side across the thrashing pines, and filled the deep rift with its shrill moaning which rang through the diapason of the shrunken river. A haze of frost-dried snow infinitesimally fine, which stung the unprotected skin like the prick of hot needles, whirled before it and then thinned, leaving bare the higher shoulders of the hills, though a rush of dingy vapour hid the ice-ribbed peaks above. The cañon was a scene of almost appalling desolation, but few of the long-booted men who hurried among the boulders had leisure to contemplate it. They were working for Geoffrey Thurstan, who did not encourage idleness.

So the stranger came almost unnoticed into the centre of the camp where its master saw him, and asked sharply, "Where do you come from, and what do you want?"

"I'm a frame-carpenter," answered the new arrival. "Got fired from the Hastings saw-mill when work slacked down. Couldn't find anybody who wanted me all round Vancouver City, and struck out for the mountains and mines. Found worse luck up here; spent all my dollars, wore my clothes out, but the boss of the Orchard Mill, who took me for a few days, said I might tell you he recommended me. I'm about played out with getting here, and mighty hungry."

Geoffrey looked the man over, and decided there

## His Master Purpose

was truth in the latter part of his story. "Take this spanner and wade across to the reef yonder," he said. "You can begin by giving those men bolting the beams down a hand."

The stranger glanced dubiously at the rush of icy water, thick with jagged cakes of frozen snow, then at his dilapidated foot gear, and hesitated. "I'm not great at swimming. It looks deep," he said.

"You can walk, I suppose," said Geoffrey. "If you do, it won't drown you," and the man prepared to obey.

He had just reached the edge of the water when Geoffrey called him. "I see you're willing, and I'll take you for a few weeks any way. In the meantime a rest wouldn't do you much harm, and the cook might find you something to keep you from starving until supper, if you asked him civilly."

"Thanks!" said the other, with a curious expression in his face. "I am a bit used up, and I guess I'll try him."

Work proceeded until a bountiful supper was served when the winter's dusk fell, for Geoffrey fed his workmen well, and the stranger, who did full justice to it, showed himself capable when the task recommenced under the flaring light of several huge pressure lamps; while that night two of his new comrades sat in the cook-shed discussing him. One was James Gillow, whom Geoffrey had first employed at Helen's instigation, and now replaced the man he formerly assisted. He was apparently without ambition, and chiefly remarkable for an antipathy to physical effort, and, in spite of a good education, found cooking suited him. He sat upon an overturned bucket discoursing whimsically at large, with a corn-cob pipe in his hand, while Mattawa Tom, who acted as Thurstan's foreman, peeled potatoes for him. The cook-shanty was particularly warm and snug, and Gillow made those he granted the right of entry work for the privilege.

"Strikes me as quaint," said the big axeman, with

## The Work of an Enemy

a grin, when the cook halted to refill his pipe. "Strikes me as quaint, it does, that some of you fellows who know so much kin do so little. Knowledge ain't worth a cent unless you've got the rustle. Now there's the boss. You talk the same talk, an' he can't well know more than you seem to do, but look where he is, while you stop right down at the bottom running a cook-shanty. Guess you were born tired, English Jim."

"I daresay you're right," answered Gillow. "Other folks in the Old Country have said the same thing, though they didn't put it so neatly. The fact is, some men, like Thurstan, are born to wear themselves out trying to manage things, while I was intended for philosophic contemplation. He's occasionally hard to get on with, but since I came here, I'm willing to acknowledge that men of his species are useful, and I have struck harder masters in this great Dominion."

Mattawa Tom laughed hoarsely as he answered, "I should say! You found him hard the day you ran black lines all over his drawings and nearly burnt his shanty up, trying to prove he didn't know his business, when you was brim-full up with Red Pine whisky."

"It was poison," said Gillow, with unruffled good humour. "Several bottles of genuine whisky would not confuse me, but I have sworn off since the day you mention, partly to oblige Thurstan, who seemed to desire it, and because I can't get any decent liquor. But what do you think of our latest acquisition?"

"He kin work, which is more than you could, before the boss taught you," was the dry answer. "But there's something quaint about him. You saw the outfit he came in with? Couldn't have swapped it with a Siwash Indian—well, the man has better clothes than you or I on underneath, and if he was so blame hard up, what did he want offering Jake five dollars for his old gum boots for?"

## His Master Purpose

"Afraid of wetting his feet. Most sensible person, considering the weather," said Gillow, indifferently.

"'Fraid of wetting his feet! This is just where horse sense beats knowledge. That fellow is scared of nothing around this camp. Hasn't it struck you the boss is going to put through a big contract in a way that's not been tried before, and there are some folks who would put up a good many dollars to see him let down nicely?"

"Well?" said Gillow, with a show of interest, and the foreman nodded sagaciously as he answered,—

"Whoever busts the boss up will have to get both feet on the neck of Mattawa Tom first, and that's not going to be easy. I'll keep my eyes right on to that fellow."

Tom went out after this, and, because he had taken up his abode in the cook-shed, Gillow, awakening at midnight, saw that his blankets were still empty. The same thing happened on several nights, and it was well for Thurstan that he had the true leader's gift of inspiring his followers with loyalty, for when a week had passed the foreman, who kept his own counsel meantime, shook Gillow out of his slumber. The latter, who groped for a boot to fling at the disturber of his peace, abandoned the benevolent intention when he saw his comrade's face under the hanging lamp.

"Don't ask no fool questions, but get your things on and come with me," said Tom.

Five minutes later Gillow, shivering all through, turned out into the frost. It was a bitter night, and a white haze which froze upon his moustache and eyebrows hung here and there among the rocks. Elsewhere the snow and froth of the river glimmered spectrally, and when the pair had left the camp some distance behind, there was light enough to see a black figure crawl up a ladder, leading to a wire rope stretched tight in mid air above the torrent. A trolley hung beneath it by means of which men and material were hauled across the chasm.

## The Work of an Enemy

"Get down here!" said Tom. "We'll watch him. If we fell over any more of these blame rocks he'd see us certain."

Gillow was glad to obey, for, though there was faint moonlight, he had already barked both shins and one knee cruelly; but it was bitterly cold beneath the boulder where he crouched in the snow, and when the black object, which worked its way along the bending cable, had disappeared among the gloom of overhanging rocks on the opposite shore, there was nothing to see or hear but tossingspray and the clamour of the river. It was still a formidable torrent, though now the feeding snows were mostly frozen fast, shrunken far below its summer level. A good many minutes had passed with painful slowness when Gillow, who regretted he had left the snug cook-shed, said, "This is distinctly monotonous, and it's about time we struck back to camp. Guess that fellow has tackled too much Red Pine whisky, and is just walking round to cool himself."

In answer the foreman grasped the speaker's shoulder, and stretched out a pointing hand. The moonlight touched one angle of the rock upon the opposite shore which encroached upon the frothing water, and the dark figure showed sharply against the slippery spur it crawled over. It vanished, reappeared, and sank from sight again, while when this had happened several times Gillow said, "Perhaps we had better go over. The man's clean gone mad."

"No, sir!" said Mattawa Tom. "No more mad than you. See what he's after? No! You don't remember, either, how mighty hard it was to wedge in the holdfasts for the chain guys stiffening the front of the dam, or how the keys work loose? There wouldn't be much of the boring machines or dam framing left if the chains pulled those wedges out. Catch on to the idee?"

Gillow gasped as he did so. The huge timber framing in question which held back the river, so that the costly boring machines could work upon the reef,



## His Master Purpose

cumbering part of its bed, had only been built with the greatest difficulty, and when finished Thurstan found it necessary to strengthen it by heavy chains made fast in the rock above. The sockets these were secured to had been wedged into deep-sunk holes, but more than once some of the hard wood keys had worked loose, and Gillow could guess what would happen if a number were partially set free at the same time.

"I do," he said. "If he hammered three or four of those wedges clear it would only need a bang on another one to give the river its way. Then it would take Thurstan six months to fix up the damage, if he ever did, and nobody would know how it happened. The cold-blooded brute's in the maintenance gang?"

"Just so. A blame smart man, too!" said Mattawa Tom. "I guess the boss wouldn't want everybody to know. Rustle back your hardest and bring him along."

Fifteen minutes later Thurstan took his place behind the boulder, and because the light was clearer now could dimly see the man swinging a heavy hammer, against the rock behind him. He knew that the miscreant, whose business was to prevent the possibility of such accidents, had only to start a few more keys, which he would probably do when the dam was clear of men, and many thousand dollars' worth of property and the result of months of labour would be swallowed by the river. A grey patch, the badge of fierce anger, chequered the bronze in either cheek when he recognised this fact.

"I want that man," he said. "Want him so badly that I'd forfeit five hundred dollars sooner than miss him. Slip forward, Gillow, as much out of sight as you can, and hide yourself on the other side of the ladder. Mattawa and I will wait for him here, and we ought to make sure of him between us."

Gillow, who stole forward stooping, swore softly as he fell over many obstacles on the way, while, as he did so, the man they waited for became visible,

## The Work of an Enemy

ascending another ladder across the river. Then, hung in the suspended trolley, he moved out, a black shape clear against the snow, along the wire which, stretched high across the gulf, looked fine as gossamer. While the others watched him, his progress grew slower on reaching the hollow, where the cable bent slightly under the weight at its centre. Then suddenly the car's progress was checked altogether, and it commenced to move in the opposite direction more rapidly than before, while Thurstan sprang to his feet.

"Slack the setting up tackles, Gillow. Hurry for your life," he shouted. "He'll cast the cable loose and be off by the Indian trail into the ranges, if he once gets across."

Gillow ran his best, where running of any kind was barely possible even by daylight, conscious that his master was slow to forgive those whose carelessness thwarted him, and that while taking the easier way over instead of crawling round a ledge, he had probably alarmed the fugitive. He reached the foot of the ladder, clambered up in a desperate hurry, cast loose the end of the tackle by means of which the cable was set up taut, but neglected in his haste to take a turn with the hemp rope about a post, which would have eased him of most of the strain.

"Got him safe!" said Tom from Mattawa, clambering to the top of the boulder, as the curve of the wire rope high above their heads increased, and in spite of the fugitive's efforts, the trolley he was suspended in ran back to the slackest part of the loop which sagged down nearer the river. Thurstan, who watched him, nodded with a sense of savage satisfaction. He did not a moment believe any workman would have either made a long journey or run considerable personal risk to do him an injury of his own initiative, which was why he was so anxious to secure the offender.

The curve grew rapidly deeper, until the rope stretched almost in two diagonals between its

## His Master Purpose

fastenings on either shore. Then the trolly descended with a run towards the river, and Geoffrey ran forward, shouting, "The weight's too much for Gillow. Bring along the coil of line from the tool locker, Tom. Hurry, I don't want to drown the rascal."

What had happened was simple. The cook, endeavouring to take a turn of the line too late, had failed, and the hemp ran through his half-frozen fingers, chafing the skin from them. Seeing Thurstan floundering in his direction over the boulders, he valiantly strove to check it, regardless of the pain until it was whipped clear of his slackening grasp and the trolly rushed downwards towards the torrent. Thurstan was abreast of it before it splashed in, and had just time to see its occupant, still clutching the rope, drawn under by the sinking wire, before he plunged recklessly into the foam.

The water was horribly cold, and the first shock left him almost paralysed and gasping. It was also running fast, and rebounding in a white confusion from great stones and uneven ledges below, but the distance was short, and Thurstan a strong swimmer, so almost before the man had risen, he was within a few yards of him. Hardly had he clutched him than Mattawa Tom, who had meantime run down stream, whirling a coil of line, loosed it, and the snaky folds, well directed, shot through the air towards Geoffrey, uncoiling as they came. By good fortune he was able to seize the end and pass it round them both, when, for Gillow had by this time joined his companion, the two men blundered backwards up the contracted beach, and Thurstan and the fugitive were drawn shorewards together, until their feet struck bottom.

They staggered out breathless and dripping, and, because Geoffrey still clutched the stranger's jacket, the latter choked out,—

"Mightily obliged to you! But you can let up now there's no more swimming. I couldn't run very far, if it was worth while trying to."

## The Work of an Enemy

"You needn't trouble to thank me," was the answer. "It wasn't because I thought the world would miss you I went in; but I can't expect much sense from a half-drowned man. Do you think the rest of the boys have heard us, Tom?"

The foreman glanced towards the tents clustered in the mouth of a ravine above, and seeing no sign of life there, shook his head, whereupon Geoffrey said,—

"Take him quietly to the cook-shed, and give him some whisky. I've no doubt that in spite of my orders you have some. Then lend him dry clothes, and bring him along to my shanty as soon as he's ready. Meantime, rouse the maintenance foreman, and if any wedges have worked loose, let him drive them home."

"You're a nice man," said Mattawa Tom, surveying the stranger disgustedly when he stood with the water draining from him in the cook-shed. "Here, get into these things and keep them as a present. I wouldn't like the feel of them after they'd been on to you."

"That's all right!" was the cool answer. "I expect the game's up, and I'm quite open to buy them off you. By the way, partner, you helped your boss to pull me out, didn't you? As I said before, I'm not great on swimming."

"I'm almost sorry I had to," said Mattawa Tom, who was a loyal partisan. "But don't call me partner, or there'll be trouble."

The stranger laughed, as, after a glass of hot liquor, he arrayed himself beside the banked up stove, and presently marched under escort towards Thurstan's wood and bark winter dwelling, Mattawa Tom close behind him with a big axe on his shoulder.

"I might be a panther you'd corralled. How do you know I haven't a pistol in my pocket, if it was any use turning ugly?" the prisoner said.

"I'm quite certain of that, because it's in mine," was the dry answer, and Tom chuckled. "You

## His Master Purpose

weren't quite smart enough when you slipped off your jacket."

Thurstan called them from the door of his shanty next moment, and Mattawa, thrusting his prisoner in, proceeded to mount guard close outside it until Thurstan reappeared, asking angrily,—

"What are you doing there?"

"I figured you might want me, sir. That man's not to be trusted," was the answer, and Thurstan laughed as he said,—


"Go back, see the maintenance man has made a good job of the wedges, and if any of the boys should ask questions you'll tell them—nothing. You don't suppose I've suddenly grown helpless, do you?"

Mattawa Tom withdrew with much reluctance, and it was long before any other person knew exactly what Geoffrey and the stranger said to each other, though Gillow informed his comrade that the latter said to him by way of explanation before sleeping,—

"Your boss is considerably too smart a man for me to bluff, and I've kind of decided to help him in the meantime. Shouldn't wonder if he didn't beat my last one, who would have seen me roasted before he'd have gone into a river for me. I'm not fond of being left out in the rain with the losing side, either, see? It's not my tip to talk too much, and I guess that's about good enough for you."

"You're going to help him!" commented Gillow, ironically. "All things considered, that's very kind of you."

Next morning Thurstan, who summoned the cook and foreman before him, said, "I want you two to keep what happened last night a close secret, and while I cannot tell you much, I may say the man who will remain in camp was, as you have no doubt guessed, only the cat's paw of several speculators, whom it wouldn't suit to see our employer, Savine, successful."



## The Work of an Enemy

"But mightn't he try the same game again?" said Mattawa, and Thurstan answered,—

"He might, but I hardly think he will, while I intend to keep him here under my own eyes until I want him. There's no particular reason why you shouldn't see he earns his wages, Tom. Gillow, it's perhaps not wholly unfortunate you dropped him into the river."

"Kind of trump ace up your sleeve!" suggested Mattawa; and his master answered smiling,—

"Not exactly. The other side are quite smart enough to know who holds the aces, but I fancy the complete disappearance of this few-spot card will puzzle them. Now, forget all about it. I wouldn't have said so much, but that I know I can trust you two!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### A GREAT UNDERTAKING

SAVE for the wail of a wet breeze from the Pacific and the moaning of the pines outside, there was unusual quietness in the wood-built villa looking down upon the valley of the Hundred Springs on the night the American specialist came up to consult with Savine's doctor from Vancouver. The master of High Maples had been brought home prostrate some days earlier, and lay for hours apparently on the point of death, during which time it was Thurstan, who, having come down to consult him, took control of the panic-stricken household with capable hands. It was he who telegraphed Thomas Savine to bring his wife and for the famous American physician, allayed Helen's fears, and when her aunt arrived prevented that lady forthwith undertaking the cure of the patient by her own prescriptions. Geoffrey's temper was never very patient, but he held it well in hand for Helen's sake, so that even the amateur physician, who condemned the doctor's treatment, was not incensed with him, and her husband said,—

"We are all indebted to you, Thurstan, and you have fixed things with so much diplomacy that Mrs Savine doesn't blame you. In fact, for one can talk to you as an old friend, I don't mind saying that, unassisted, I couldn't have kept her hands off my poor brother."

"I am very pleased to hear I have not incurred Mrs Savine's displeasure," said Geoffrey, and even then Thomas Savine, glad to forget his anxiety for a moment, could smile.

## A Great Undertaking

"Do you Britishers always talk like a book? I guess you have more reason to be pleased than you know of," he said.

On the night in question, Geoffrey anxiously waited the physician's verdict in the library with Thomas Savine, making spasmodic, and only partially successful, attempts to divert the attention of the kindly, gray-haired gentleman. Geoffrey had a warm regard for his employer's brother, and watched him sympathetically, as for a time he paced restlessly to and fro. Then he sat very still, answering his companion abstractedly and glancing at his watch until Geoffrey found his stock of observations exhausted, and the heavy silence was only broken by the mournful shrilling of the wind. At last, when the tension grew almost unbearable, Thomas Savine said,—

"They cannot be much longer, and we'll hear their verdict soon. I'm trying to hope for the best, Thurstan, knowing it can't be good all the time. This has been a blow to me. You see we were a one-man family, and it was Julius who started off all the rest of us. Must have been mighty sick of us several times after he married, but he never showed a sign, and what a man he was—tireless, indefatigable, nothing too big for him—until his wife died. Then all the grit seemed to melt right out of him, and during the last few years I knew, what mighty few people besides yourself know now, that Julius was just a shadow of what he had been. He held all the wires in his own hands too long, and, as he hadn't an understudy with the grit to act by himself, I was glad when he took hold of you."

"He has always been a generous and considerate master," interposed Geoffrey. "But I had better leave you. I hear the doctors coming."

Savine laid a detaining grasp upon his arm. "I want you right here. It's your concern as well as mine."

The two doctors entered, and the one from



## His Master Purpose

Vancouver said, "I will let my colleague express his opinion, and may say that our patient admitted to him a complicating weakness I had suspected already. I wish we had better news to give you, but while it was your brother's wish that Mr Thurstan should know, I should almost prefer to first communicate with his own family."

"You can both speak right out; only be quick about it," said Thomas Savine.

"It is tolerably simple, and while I sympathise with you, I should not consider it became me to disguise the truth," said the keen-eyed, lean-faced American. "Though Mr Savine will partly recover from this attack, his career as an active man is closed. His heart may hold out a few years longer, if you follow my instructions, or it may at any time fail him—if he worries over anything, it certainly will. In any case, he will never be strong again. Mental powers and physical vigour have also been reduced to lowest level by over-work and excessive, if intermittent, indulgence in what I may call a very devilish drug—a particular Chinese preparation of opium, not generally known even on this opium-consuming coast. Under its influence he may still be capable of spasmodic fits of energy, but while each dose will assist towards his dissolution, I dare not—at this stage—recommend complete deprivation. I have arranged with your own adviser as to the best treatment known to modern science, but fear it cannot prove very efficacious. That's about all I can tell you in general terms, gentlemen."

"It is worse than I feared," said Thomas Savine, leaning forward in his chair, with his elbows on the table, and his chin in his hands, while before the two doctors withdrew, the Canadian one said,—

"He is anxious to see Mr Thurstan, and in an hour or so it could do no harm. I will rejoin you shortly, Mr Savine."

The door closed behind them, and Thomas Savine looked straight at Thurstan as he said, "I know little

## A Great Undertaking

about his business, but shall have to look into it for his daughter's sake. You will help me?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, quietly. "It seems out of place now, but I cannot honestly co-operate with you without mentioning a conditional promise your brother made me, and my own ambition. Perhaps you can guess it."

"I can," said Savine, stretching out his hand. "I won't say that I hadn't thought Helen might have chosen among the highest in the Dominion just because it wouldn't be true, but you'll have my good wishes if you will see my poor brother through at least his immediate difficulties. You had Mrs Savine's long ago. There is one part of Julius's trouble Helen must never know."

The two men's fingers met in a grip that was more eloquent than many protestations, and Geoffrey went out into the moaning wind pacing to and fro bare-headed before he was summoned to the sick man's room. The few days that had passed since he had seen his employer had set their mark upon Savine. He lay in his plainly-furnished room with bloodless lips, drawn face, and curiously-glazed eyes, but he looked up with an attempt at his characteristic smile as Geoffrey approached, while, at his signal, the nurse slipped away.

"I asked them to tell you, so you might know the kind of man I am," he said. "You have got to exercise that partnership option one way or another right now. It is not too late to back out, and I wouldn't blame you."

"I should blame myself to my last day if I did, sir," answered Geoffrey, trying to hide the shock he felt, and Savine beckoned him nearer.

"It's a big thing you are going into, but you'll do it with both eyes wide open," he said. "For the past few years Julius Savine has been a shadow, and an empty name, and his affairs are mixed considerable. Reckless contracts taken with a muddled brain and speculation to make up the losses, have, between them,

## His Master Purpose

resulted in chaos. I'm too sick to value what I own, and no book clerk can. I ran things myself too long, and no one was fit to take hold when I slackened my grip. But there's still the business, and there's still the name, and the one man in this province I can trust them to in the meantime is you. I should have let go before but I was greedy—greedy for and proud of my daughter."

"It is comprehensible, sir," said Geoffrey. "So far as I can serve you, you can command me."

"I know it," was the answer. "What's more, I feel it in me that you mayn't lose by it. Lord, how hard it is, but there's no use whining when brought up sharp by one's own folly. But see here, Geoffrey Thurstan, if Helen will take you freely I can trust her to you, but if, when I go under, she looks beyond you, and you attempt to trade upon her gratitude or her aunt's favour, my curse will follow you. Besides, if I know Helen Savine, she will be able to repay you full measure should you win her so."

For just a moment the old flame of quick anger burned in Geoffrey's eyes, then he answered quietly, "I regret you even fancy I would do so. God forbid that I should ever bring sorrow upon Miss Savine. All I ask is a fair field and the right to help her according to her need."

"Forgive me!" said Savine. "Of late I have grown scared about her future. I believe you, Thurstan; I can't say more. Felt the more sure of you when you told me straight out about what was born in you. Lord, how I envied you. The man who can stand those devils off can do most anything. It was when my wife died they got their claws on me. I was trying to forget my troubles by doing three men's work, but you can't fool with nature, and I'd done it too long already. Anyway, when I couldn't eat or sleep they had their opportunity. At first they made my brain work quicker, but soon after I fell in with you I knew that, unless he had a good man beside him, Savine's game was over. But I wouldn't

## A Great Undertaking

be beaten. I was holding on for Helen's sake to leave her the dollars and a name. All this is getting monotonous to you?"

"No, sir, but I fear it must be trying to you."

"Let me finish when I can," Savine answered. "I cheated the nurse and doctor to-day, and I'll be very like a dead man to-morrow. You'll go down to my offices and overhaul everything; then you'll come right back and see if we can make a deal. I'll have my notion fixed up straight and square, but this is its inside meaning. You will while doing your best for your own hand, meantime, hold her father's name clean before the world and Helen Savine, win the most for her out of the wreck, and rush through the reclamation scheme—which is the key to all."

"As you said—it's a big undertaking, but I'll do my best," commenced Geoffrey, but Savine checked him.

"Go down and see what you make of things. Maybe the sight of them will choke you off. I'll take no other answer. Send Tom to me," he said.

It was next day when Geoffrey had speech with Helen, who sent for him. She was standing beside a window when he came in, looking tall and statuesque in a long sombre-tinted dress which emphasised the whiteness of her full round throat and the pallor of her face. Its faint, olive colouring had faded, there were shadows about her eyes, and at the first glance Geoffrey's heart went out towards her. It was evident the news had been a heavy shock, but, he fancied equally so that she was ready to meet the inevitable with undiminished courage. Still, her fingers were cold when, for a moment, they touched his own.

"Sit down, Geoffrey. I have a good deal to say to you, and don't know how to begin," she said. "But first I am sincerely grateful for all you have done."

"We will not mention that. Neither, I hope, need I say that Miss Savine of all people could never be indebted to me, or that I am sorry. You must know

## His Master Purpose

it already. But wouldn't it be more seemly if I placed you here, and waited until you had arranged your thoughts—so?"

Helen thanked him with her eyes as she sank into the chair he wheeled out so that the light left her face in shadow; after which the man stood near the window framing, not looking directly towards her. She appreciated the consideration which prompted the action and the respect implied by his attitude, and was encouraged by them to proceed with what was a difficult task.

"I am going to ask a great deal of you, and remind you of a promise you once made," she said. "You will not think it ungracious if I say there is no one else who can do what seems so necessary, and ask you if you do not consider you owe something to my father. It is hard for me, not because I doubt you, but because—"

Geoffrey checked her with a half-raised hand. "Please don't, Miss Savine—I can understand. You find it difficult to receive, when, as yet, you have, you think, but little to give. Would that make any difference? The little—just to know that I had helped you—would be so much to me."

Again Helen was grateful, and, though the man looked away from her, noticed the sigh he hoped she did not. Then, and the words slipped from her instinctively, "You learn quickly," she said.

"Is that surprising?" and Geoffrey smiled as he answered, while for a moment a flash, which showed she would, under changed circumstances, have taken up the challenge, gleamed in Helen's eyes. Then the look of anxiety and distress returned as she said,—

"I dare spare no effort for my father's sake. He has always been kindness itself to me, and it is only now I know how much I love him. Hitherto I have taken life too easily, forgetting that sorrow and tragedy could overtake me. I have heard the physician's verdict, and know he cannot be spared very long to me. I also know how his mind is set upon the completion of his

## A Great Undertaking

last great scheme. That is why, and because of your promise, I have dared ask help of—you."

"Will it make it easier if I say that, quite apart from his daughter's wishes, I am bound in honour to protect the interests of Julius Savine so far as I can?" interposed Geoffrey. "He found me much as you did, a struggling adventurer, and with unusual kindness helped me on the way to prosperity. All I owe to him, and perhaps, the more so because we have cunning enemies, my own mind is bent on the completion of the scheme. I believe we shall triumph, Miss Savine, and I use the word advisedly, still expecting much from your father's skill."

Helen gravely shook her head. "I recognise your kind intentions, but you must expect nothing. It is a hard thing for me to say, but the truth is always best, and again it is no small favour I ask from you—to do the work for the credit of another's name—and, taking his task upon your shoulders, make a broken man's last days easier. I want you to sign the new partnership agreement, and am glad you recognise that my father was a good friend to you."

The girl's courage nearly deserted her, for Helen was young still, and had been tried hard, while Geoffrey, who felt he would have given his life for the right to comfort her, could only discreetly turn his face away.

"I will do it all, Miss Savine," he said gravely. "I had already determined on as much, but you must try to believe that the future is not so hopeless as it looks. You will consider I have given you a solemn pledge."

"Then I can only say God speed you, for my thanks would be inadequate," was Helen's answer, and her voice trembled as she spoke. "But I must also ask your forgiveness for my presumption in judging you that day. I now know how far I was mistaken."

Geoffrey knew what she referred to. The day in question had been a memorable one for him, and,

## His Master Purpose

with pulses throbbing, he moved forward a pace eyes fixed upon the speaker's face. For a moment forgetting everything, his resolutions were flung the winds, and he trembled with passion and hope. Then he remembered his promise to the sick man and Helen's own warning, and recovered a partial mastery of himself. It was a mere sense of justice which prompted the girl's words, his reason was not his, but he also felt, instinctively, they implied more than this, though he did not know how much, and stood irresolute until Helen looked up, and, if it had ever existed, the time for speech was past.

"I fear I have kept you over long, but there is a question I must ask. You have seen my father in many of his moods, and there is something in that state of limp apathy he occasionally falls into which as it does not seem directly connected with his affliction, puzzles me. I cannot help thinking there is another danger of which I do not know. Can you not enlighten me?"

Helen leaned forward, a strange fear stamped upon her face, and, fresh from the previous struggle with Geoffrey, whose heart yearned to comfort her, felt her powers of resistance strained to the utmost. Since this was a question he could not answer, and remembering Savine's words—to hold her father's name clean—he said thickly, "There is nothing I can do for you. You must only remember that the physician has admitted a cheering possibility."

"I will try to believe in it," and the trouble deepened in Helen's face, while her voice expressed bitter disappointment. "You have been very kind, and I must not tax you too heavily."

Geoffrey turned away, distressed for her, inwardly anathematising his evil fortune in being asked that particular question. He had, he also faltered when, perhaps, almost within sight of victory neglecting to press home an advantage which might have won success. "It is, perhaps, the first time I have wilfully thrown away my chances—the

## A Great Undertaking

who wins is the one who sees nothing but the prize," he said. "But I could not have taken advantage of her anxiety for her father and gratitude to me, while, if I had, and won, there would be always between us the knowledge that I had not played the game fairly."

Unconsciously he spoke the last words aloud, for Thomas Savine, approaching, must have heard them. "We wouldn't think that likely, Thurstan," he said. "I was looking for you, and want to know when you'll go down to Vancouver with me to puzzle through everything before finally deciding just what you're going to do."

He passed on presently, and when Geoffrey, still feeling physically the strain of the battle he had fought, stood beside an open window wiping his forehead, he found himself confronted by Mrs Savine.

"I have been worried about you," she said. "You're carrying too heavy a load, and it's wearing you thin. You look a very sick man to-day, and ought to remember that the main thing to preserve one's health is to take life easily."

"I have no doubt of it, madam," and Thurstan fidgeted, fearing what might follow; "but, unfortunately, one cannot always do so."

Then the lady held out a little phial as she added, "A simple restorative is the next best thing, and you will find yourself braced in mind and body by a few doses of this. It is what I desired to fix up my poor brother-in-law with when you prevented me."

"Then the least I can do is to take it myself," said Geoffrey, smiling to hide his uneasiness. "I presume you do not wish me to do so immediately? It is only in keeping with the kindness received from all your family that you should think of me."

Mrs Savine beamed upon him. "You might hold out an hour or two longer, but delays are dangerous," she said. "Kindness! Well, there's a tolerable reason why we should be good to you, and, for I guess





## His Master Purpose

you're not a clever man all round, Geoffrey Thurstan, you have piled up a considerable obligation in your favour in one direction."

"May I ask you to speak more plainly, madam?" said Geoffrey; and the lady answered,—

"You may, but I can't do it. Still, what you did, because you thought it the fair thing, won't be lost to you. Now, don't ask any more fool questions, but go right away, take ten drops of the elixir, and don't worry. It will all come right some day."

The speaker's meaning was discernible, and Geoffrey, having a higher opinion than many people of Mrs Savine's sagacity, went out into the sunlight, satisfied. He also held up the phial and was about to hurl it among the firs, but, either grateful for the donor's words, or softened by what he had heard and seen, actually drank a little of it instead. Then, as a revulsion from the strain of the past few days, he burst into a ringing laugh. "It would have been mean, and I daresay I haven't absorbed sufficient of the stuff to quite poison me, he said."

## CHAPTER XV

### MILLICENT TURNS TRAITRESS

IT was with a heavy sense of responsibility that Geoffrey returned from a visit to Savine's offices in Vancouver, and yet there was satisfaction mingled with it. Thomas Savine, who knew little of engineering, was no fool at finance, and the week the pair spent together made the situation comparatively plain. It was fraught with peril and would have daunted many a man, but the very uncertainty and prospect of a struggle which would tax every energy appealed to Thurstan. He also felt that here was an opportunity of proving his devotion to Helen in the fashion he could do it best.

"I'm uncommonly thankful we didn't send for an accountant; the fewer folks who handle those books the better," said Thomas Savine. "I was prepared for a surprise, Thurstan, but never expected this. I suppose things can be straightened out, but when I'd fixed up that balance it just took my breath away. More than half the assets are unmarketable stock and ventures no man could value, while whether they will ever realise anything, or what Julius has been doing the past two years, goodness only knows. It's mighty certain he doesn't know himself. I can let my partners run our business down in Oregon and stay right here for a time, counting on you to do the outside work, if what you have seen hasn't choked you off. You haven't signed the agreement yet. How does the whole thing strike you?"

"As a considerable chaos that can and must be reduced to order," answered Geoffrey with a reckless

## His Master Purpose

laugh. "I intend to sign the agreement, and, foreseeing you may have trouble about the dollars which I propose to spend freely, am adding all my private savings to the working capital. It is therefore neck or nothing with me now, as I fear it is with the rest of you, and, in my opinion, we should let everything but the reclamation scheme go. It will either ruin us or pay us five-fold if we can put it through."

"Just so!" and Savine nodded. "I leave that end to you, but I've got to explain things to Helen, and don't like the thought of it. My niece has talents, and, as her future lies at stake, she has a right to know, but it will be another shock to her. Poor Julius brought her up in luxury, and I expect has been far too mixed of late to know that he was tottering towards the verge of bankruptcy. A smart outside accountant would have soon scented trouble, but I don't quite blame my brother's cashier, who is a clerk and nothing more, for taking everything at its book value."

That afternoon Helen sat with the two men in the library at High Maples, a roll of papers on the table before her, and when Thomas Savine had made the position as plain as possible, leaned back in her chair with crossed hands for a space.

"I thank you for telling me so much, and I can grasp the main issues," she said at length. "If my opinion is of value I would say I agree with you that the bold course is best. But you will need much money, and as it is evident money will not be plentiful, I must do my part in helping you. So, because this establishment and our mode of life here is expensive, while it will please my father to be near the scene of operations, we will let High Maples and retire to a mountain ranch. I fear we have maintained a style circumstances hardly justified too long."

"It's a sensible plan all through. I must tell you Mr Thurstan has—" commenced Savine, and ceased

## Millicent Turns Traitress

abruptly, when Geoffrey, who frowned at him, broke in,—

"We have troubled Miss Savine with sufficient details, and I fancy the arrangement suggested would help to keep her father tranquil, especially as our progress will be slow. Spring is near already, and, in spite of all our efforts, we shall not be able to deepen the pass in the cañon before the waters rise. That means we can do nothing there until next winter, and must continue the dyking all summer. It is, however, very brave of you, Miss Savine."

Helen smiled upon him as she answered, "The compliment is doubtful. Did you suppose I could do nothing? But we must march out with banners flying, or, more prosaically, paragraphs in the papers, stating that Julius Savine will settle near the scene of his most important operations, instead of slipping away, and while here you should show yourself in public as much as possible, Mr Thurstan. Whenever I can help you, you must tell me, and I shall demand a strict account of your stewardship from both of you."

The two men went out satisfied, and Savine said, "I guess some folks are mighty stupid when they consider that only the ugly women are clever. There's my niece—well, nobody could call her plain, and you can see how she's taking hold instead of weakening down. Some women never show the grit that's in them until they're fighting for their children; but you can look out for trouble, Thurstan, if you fool away any chances while Helen Savine's behind you fighting for her father."

A few days later it happened that Henry Leslie, confidential secretary to the Industrial Enterprise Company, sat, with a frown upon his puffy face, in his handsome office. He wore a silk-bound frock coat, a garment not then common in Vancouver city, and a floral spray from Mexico in his buttonhole; but he was evidently far from happy, and glanced at the irate specimen of muscular manhood standing before him

## His Master Purpose

with ill-concealed dismay. The man, who was a sturdy British agriculturalist, had forced his way in, defying the clerks specially instructed to intercept him. Leslie had first set up in business as a land agent, a calling which affords a promising field for talents of his particular description, and having taken the new arrival's money, had, by a little manipulation of the survey lines, transferred him mostly barren rock and giant trees instead of land he could grow hops upon. It was a game which had been often played before, but the particular emigrant was a determined man and had announced his firm intention of obtaining his money back or summary vengeance on his betrayer.

"Danged if thee hadn't more hiding holes than a rottan, but I've hunted thee from one to one, and now I've found thee I want my brass," said the brawny, loud-voiced Briton; and Leslie answered truthfully,—

"I tell you I haven't got it, even if you had any claim on me, and it's not my fault you're disappointed if you foolishly bought land before you could understand a Canadian survey plan."

"Then thou'lt better get it," was the uncompromising answer. "Understand a plan! I've stuck to the marked one I got from thee, and there's lawyers in this country as can. It was good soil and maples I went up to see, and how the —— can anybody raise crops off the big stones thou sold me? I'm going to have my rights, and, meantime, I'm trapesing round all the bars in this city talking about thee. There's a good many already as believe me."

"Then you had better look out. Confound you!" said Leslie, taking a bold course in desperation. "There's a law which can stop that game in this country, and I'll set it in motion. Anyway, I can't have you making this noise in my private office. Go away before I call my clerks to make you."

It was a distinct failure, for the aggrieved

## Millicent Turns Traitress

agriculturalist, who was apparently not quite sober, laughed uproariously as he seized a heavy ruler, answering, "That's a good yan. Thou darsen't for thy life go near a court with me, and the first clerk who tries to put me out, danged if I don't pound half the life out of him and thee. I'm stayin' here comfortable until I get my money."

He pulled out a filthy pipe, and filled it with what, when he struck a match, appeared to be particularly vile tobacco, and Leslie, who fumed in his chair, said presently, "You are only wasting your time and mine—and for heaven's sake take a cigar and fling that pipe away. I haven't got the money by me, and it's the former owner's business, not mine, but if you'll call round, say the day after to-morrow, I'll see what we can do."

He named the day in question, knowing he would be absent then, and the stranger, heaving his heavy limbs out of an easy chair, helped himself to a handful of choice cigars before he prepared to depart, saying dubiously, "I'll be back on Wednesday bright and early, bringing several friends as will see fair play with me. One of them will be a lawyer, and if he's no good either, look out, mister, for I'll find another way of settling thee!"

Now there are in Canada, as well as other British Colonies, capitalists, dealing in lands and financing mines, whose efforts make for the progress of civilisation and the good of the community. There are also others, described by their victims as a curse to any country, and representatives of both descriptions were interested in the Industrial Enterprise. Therefore the unfortunate secretary groaned when one of the latter species, who passed his visitor in the doorway, came in smiling in a curious manner. Leslie, who hoped he had not heard much, was rudely undeceived.

"I'm hardly surprised at certain words I heard in the corridor," he commenced. "Your English friend was telling an interesting tale about you to all the

## His Master Purpose

loungers in the Rideau bar to-day. They seemed to believe him—he told it very creditably. When are you going to stop it, Leslie?"

"When I can pay him the equivalent of five hundred sterling in blackmail. I am afraid it will be a long time," answered the secretary, ruefully.

"Then I would advise you to beg, borrow or steal the dollars. A man of your abilities and practical experience oughtn't to find much difficulty in doing any of them," said the newcomer. "The tale may have been a fabrication, but it sounded true, and while I don't set up as a reformer I am a director of this Company, and can't have those rumours set going about its secretary. No, I don't want to hear your side of the case—it's probably highly creditable to you—but I know all about the kind of business you were running, and a good many other folks in this province do so too."

"Who, in the name of perdition, would lend me the money? And it takes every cent I've got to live up to my post. You don't pay too liberally," said the unfortunate man, stung into brief fury by the reference to his character.

"I will," was the answer. "That is to say, I'll fix things up with the plain-spoken Britisher, and take your acknowledgment in return for his written statement that he has no claim on you. I know how to handle that breed of cattle, and mayn't press you for the money until you can pay it comfortably."

"What are you doing it for?" asked Leslie, dubiously.

"For several reasons; don't mind mentioning a few. I want more say in the running of this Company, and I could get at useful facts my colleagues didn't know through its secretary. I could also give him instructions without the authority of a board meeting, see? And I fancy I could put a spoke in Savine's wheel best by doing it quietly my own way. One live man can often get through more than a squabbling dozen, and the money is really nothing much to me."

## Millicent Turns Traitress

"I had better sue the Englishman for defamation, and prove my innocence, even if the legal expenses ruin me," said Leslie, and the other, who laughed aloud, checked him.

"Pshaw! It is really useless trying that tone with me, especially as I heard about another dispute of the kind you once had at Westminster. You're between the devil and the deep sea, but if you don't start kicking you'll get no hurt from me. Call it a deal—and, to change the subject. Where's the man you sent up to worry Thurstan?"

"I don't know," said Leslie. "I gave him a round sum, part of it out of my own pocket, for I couldn't in the meantime think of a suitable entry—all the directors don't agree with you. I know he started, but he has never come back again."

"Then you have got to find him," was the dry answer. "We'll have law-suits and land commissions before we're through, and if Thurstan has corralled or bought that man over, and plays him at the right moment, it would certainly cost you your salary."

"I can't find him; I've tried," said Leslie.

"Then you had better try again and keep right on trying. Get at Thurstan through his friends if you can't do it any other way. Your wife is already a figure in local society."

That night Leslie leaned against the mantelpiece in his quarters talking to his wife. They had just returned from some function, and Millicent lay in a lounge chair in costly evening-dress watching him keenly.

"You would not like to be poor again, Millicent?" he said, fixing his glance not upon her face but on her jewelled hands, and the woman smiled somewhat bitterly as she answered,—

"Poor again! That would seem to infer that we are prosperous now. Do you know how much I owe half the stores in this city, Harry?"

"I don't want to!" said Leslie, with a gesture of impatience. "Your tastes were always extravagant,



## His Master Purpose

and I mean the kind of poverty which is always refused credit."

"My tastes!" and Millicent's tone was indignant. "I suppose I am fond of money, or the things that it can buy, and you may remember you once promised me plenty. But why can't you be honest and own that the display we make is part of your programme? I have grown tired of this scheming and endeavouring to thrust ourselves upon people who don't want us, and if you will be content to stay at home and progress slowly, Harry, I will gladly do my share to help you."

Millicent Leslie was ambitious, but the woman who endeavours to assist an impecunious husband's schemes by becoming a social influence usually suffers, even if successful, in the process, and Millicent had not been particularly successful hitherto. She was also subject to morbid fits of reflection, accompanied by the framing of good resolutions, and, for the moment at least, meant what she said. It is therefore possible that night might have marked a turning-point in her career had her husband listened to her, but before she could continue, his thin lips curled into a sneer as he said,—

"Isn't it a little too late for either of us to practise the somewhat monotonous domestic virtues? You need not be afraid of hurting my feelings, Millicent, by veiling your meaning. But, in the first place, at the time you transferred your affections to me I had the money, and, in the second, I must either carry out what you call my programme or go down with a crash shortly. If luck favours me the prize I am striving for is, however, worth winning, but things are going most confoundedly badly just now. In fact, I shall be driven into a corner unless you can help me."

Mrs Leslie possessed no exalted code of honour, but, in her present frame of mind, her husband's words excited fear and suspicion, and she asked sharply, "What is it you want me to do?"

## Millicent Turns Traitress

"I will try to explain. You know something of my business. I sent up a clever rascal to—well, to pass as a workman seeking employment, and so enable us to forestall some of Savine's mechanical improvements. He took the money I gave him and started, but we have never seen him since, and it is particularly desirable that I should know whether he tried and failed or what has become of him. If the man made his exact commission known it would cost me my place. The very people who would applaud me if successful would be the first to make a scapegoat of me otherwise."

"Your explanation is not quite lucid, but how could I get at the truth?"

"Ingratiate yourself with Miss Savine, or get that crack-brained aunt of hers to cure your neuralgia. There are also two young premium pupils, sons of leading Montreal citizens, in her father's service, who dance attendance upon the fair Helen continually. It shouldn't be difficult to flatter them a little and set them talking."

"Do you think women are utterly foolish, or converse about dams and earthworks?" asked Millicent, trying to check her rising indignation.

"No. I know a good many of you have the devil's own cunning, and there can be but few much keener than you. Women in this country know a good deal more about their lawful protectors' affairs than they generally do at home, and Miss Savine is sufficiently proud not to care whose wife you were if she took a fancy to you."

"It would be utterly useless!" and Leslie looked his wife over with coolly critical approval, noting how the soft lamplight sparkled in the pale gold clusters of her hair, the beauty that still hung to her somewhat careworn face, and how the costly dress enhanced the symmetry of a finely-moulded frame.

"Then why can't you confine your efforts to the men? You are pretty and clever enough to wheedle secrets even out of Thurstan's self, now

## His Master Purpose

you have apparently become reconciled to him," he said.

For the first time since the revelations that followed Leslie's downfall a red brand of shame and anger flamed in Millicent's cheeks. She rose, facing the speaker with an almost breathless "How dare you? Is there no limit to the price I must pay for my folly? Thurstan was—. But how could any woman compare him with you?"

"Sit down again, Millicent," said Leslie with an uneasy laugh. "These heroics hardly become you—and nobody can extort a good deal in return for—nothing—better than you. In any case, it's no use debating whether one or both of us were foolish now, and I'm speaking no more than the painful truth when I say that if I can't get the man back into my hands I shall have to make a break without a dollar from British Columbia. Since you have offended your English friends past forgiveness, God knows what, if that happened, would become of you, while Thurstan would marry Miss Savine and sail on to riches—confusion to him!"

Millicent was never afterwards certain why she accepted the quest she shrank from, almost with loathing, at first. She was conscious, while her husband proceeded to substantiate the truth of his statement, of rage and shame, as well as a profound contempt for him, and, because of it, a wholly illogical desire to inflict suffering upon the man whom she now considered had too readily accepted his rejection. She also disliked Miss Savine, and was possessed by an abject fear of poverty. So eventually, turning a troubled face towards the man, she said,—

"I don't know that I shall ever forgive you, and feel that you will live to regret this night's work bitterly. However, as you say, it is over late for us to fear losing the self-respect we parted with long ago. Rest contented—I will try."

"That is better. We are what ill-luck or the devil



## Millicent Turns Traitress

made us," said Leslie, laying his hand on his wife's white shoulder, but in spite of her recent declaration Millicent shrank from his touch.

"Your fingers burn me. Take them away. As I said, I will help you, but if there was any faint hope of happiness or better things left us, you have killed it," she said.

"I should say the chance was hardly worth counting on," answered Leslie as he withdrew to soothe himself with a brandy-and-soda, while Millicent sat still in her chair, with shapely hands, which had been clean and innocent once, clenched hard on the arms of it, staring straight before her.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE INFATUATION OF ENGLISH JIM

It was perhaps hardly wise of Geoffrey Thurstan to suddenly promote English Jim from the position of camp cook to that of amanuensis. Geoffrey, however, found himself very hardly pressed when it became necessary to divide his time between Vancouver and the scene of practical operations, and remembered that the man he had promoted had been Helen's *protégé*. James Gillow was also a fair draughtsman, and if not remarkable otherwise for mental capacity, wielded a facile pen, and Geoffrey found it a relief to turn his rapidly-increasing correspondence over to him. It was for this reason Gillow accompanied him on a business visit to Victoria. The latter was one of the careless, good-humoured men their comrades usually give nick-names to.

English Jim enjoyed the visit, the more so because he found one or two acquaintances who had achieved some degree of prosperity in that fair city and entertained him so well that on the morning of Geoffrey's return he boarded the steamer contented with himself and the world in general. He was perfectly sober, so he afterwards decided, or he could never have succeeded in working out quantities from rough sketches Thurstan gave him on board a rolling vessel, but he had breakfasted with his friends, just before sailing, at a hotel, and the valedictory potations had increased instead of assuaging his thirst.

The steamer was a fast one, the day fine and pleasant with the first warmth of spring, and Geoffrey sat under the lee of a deckhouse languidly

## The Infatuation of English Jim

enjoying a cigar and looking out across the sparkling sea. Gillow, who came up now and then for a breath of air, envied him each time he returned to pore over papers that rose and fell perplexingly on one end of the saloon table. It was hard to get his scale exactly on the lines of the drawings; the sun-rays that beat in through the skylights at every roll dazzled his eyes, and his sight did not become much keener after each visit to the bar. Nevertheless, few people would have suspected English Jim of alcoholic indulgence as he jotted down weights and quantities in his pocket-book.

Meantime, his master commenced to find the view of the snow-clad Olympians grow monotonous. It is true that with every pinnacle silhouetted a spire of unsullied whiteness against softest azure they towered, a sight to entrance the vision—ethereally majestic above a cerulean sea—but Geoffrey had seen rather too much snow unpleasantly close at hand during the last few months. Therefore he opened the paper beside him, and frowned to see certain rumours he had heard in Victoria embodied in an article on the Crown lands policy. Anyone with sufficient knowledge to read between the lines could identify the writer's instances of how a gross injustice might be done the community with certain conditional grants made to Savine.

"That man has been well posted. He may have been influenced by a mistaken public spirit or quite possibly by a less praiseworthy motive, but if we have any more bad breakdowns I can foresee trouble," Geoffrey said to himself.

Then he turned his eyes towards the groups of passengers, and presently started at the sight of a lady carrying a camp chair, a book, and a bundle of wrappings along the heaving deck. It was Millicent Leslie, and there was no doubt she had recognised him, for she had set down her burden and waited for his assistance. Geoffrey was at her side next moment and presently ensconced her snugly under the

## His Master Purpose

lee of the deckhouse, where he waited, by no means wholly pleased at the meeting. He had spent most of the previous night with certain gentlemen interested in finance and provincial politics, and being new to the gentle art of wire-pulling had not quite recovered his serenity. He also regretted the good cigar he had thrown away, and scarcely felt equal to sustaining the semi-sentimental conversation Millicent had affected when he met her latterly, but she was alone, and cut off all hope of escape by saying,—

"You will not desert me. One never feels solitude so much as when left to one's own resources among a crowd of strangers."

"Certainly not, if you can put up with my company; but where is your husband?" asked Geoffrey, and Millicent looked up at him with a chastened expression.

"Enjoying himself. Some gentlemen, whose goodwill is worth gaining, asked him to go inland for a few days' fishing, and he said it was necessary he should. Accordingly, I am as usual left to my own company while I make a solitary journey down the Sound. It is hardly pleasant, but I suppose all men are much the same, and we poor women must not complain."

Millicent managed to convey a good deal more than she said, and her sigh expressed that she often suffered keenly from loneliness, but while Geoffrey felt sorry for her, he was occupied by another thought just then, and did not at first answer.

"What are you puzzling over, Geoffrey? Your face betrays you," she asked, and the man smiled as he answered her.

"I was wondering if it was the same errand took your husband to Victoria, which brought me there."

"I cannot say," and Millicent's gesture betokened weariness. "I know nothing of my husband's business, and must do him the justice to say that he seldom troubles me about it. I have little taste for

## The Infatuation of English Jim

details of intricate financial scheming, but the practical operations, such as your task among the mountains, would appeal to me. It must be both romantic and inspiring to pit one's self against the rude forces of Nature, but one grows tired of the prosaic struggle which is fought by eating one's enemies' dinners and patiently bearing the slights of lukewarm allies' wives. However, since the fear of poverty is always before me, I try to play my part in it."

Now, Helen Savine had erred strangely when she concluded that Geoffrey Thurstan was without sympathy. Hard and painfully blunt as he could be, he was nevertheless compassionate towards women, though not always happy in expressing it, and when Millicent folded her slender hands with a pathetic sigh, he was moved to sincere pity and indignation. He knew that some of the worthy Colonials' wives and daughters could be, on occasion, almost brutally frank, and that in spite of his efforts Leslie was not wholly popular.

"I can quite understand! It must be a trying life for you, but there are always chances for an enterprising man in this country, and you must hope that your husband will shortly raise you above the necessity."

"Please don't think I am complaining," and Millicent read his sympathy in his eyes. "It was only because you looked so kind, and I fear that I have grown morbid and said too much. But one-sided confidence is hardly fair, and, to change the subject, tell me how fortune favours you."

"It is a large order. Where shall I begin?" and Millicent smiled, as most men would have fancied, bewitchingly.

"You need not be bashful. Tell me about your adventures in the mountains, with all the hairbreadth escapes, fantastic colouring, and romantic medley of incidents that must be crowded into the life of any one engaged in such a task as yours."



## His Master Purpose

"I am afraid the romance wears thin, leaving only a monotonous, not to say sordid, reality, while details of cubic quantities would hardly interest you. Still, and remember you have brought it upon yourself, I will do my best—" and Geoffrey reluctantly commenced an account of his experiences related in a very indifferent manner at first, but warming to his subject, spoke almost eloquently at length. He was not a vain man, but Millicent had set the right chord vibrating when she chose that topic. He stopped at last abruptly, with an uneasy laugh. "There! I must have tired you, but you must blame yourself," he said.

"No!" was the woman's answer. "I have rarely heard anything more interesting. It must be a very hard battle, well worth winning, but you are fortunate in one respect—having only the rock and river to contend against instead of human enemies."

"I am afraid we have both," was the incautious answer, and Millicent looked out across the white-flecked waters as she said indifferently, "But there can be nobody but simple cattle-raisers and forest-clearers in that region, and what could your enemies gain by following you there?"

"They might interfere with my plans or thwart them. One of them nearly did so!" and Geoffrey, hesitating, glanced down at his companion just a second too late to notice the look of suspiciously-eager interest in her face, for Millicent had put on the mask again. She was a clever actress, quick to press into her service smile or sigh where words might have been injudicious, and with feminine curiosity and love of unearthing a secret aroused, was bent on accomplishing her purpose. It did not necessarily follow that she should impart the secret to her husband when won, she said to herself. Geoffrey was, for the moment, off his guard, and victory seemed certain for the woman.

"How did that happen?" she asked, outwardly with languid indifference, inwardly quivering with

## The Infatuation of English Jim

suspense, but, as luck would have it, the steamer, entering one of the tide races which sweep those narrow waters, rolled wildly just then, and Geoffrey held her chair fast while the book fell from her knee and went sliding down the slanted deck to lee. Millicent bit one red lip savagely while he pursued it, and could hardly conceal her chagrin when he returned with the volume.

"It flew open and a page or two got wet in the scuppers. Still, it will soon dry in the sun, and because I did my best, you will excuse me being a few seconds too slow to save it," he said.

Millicent was willing to allow him to deceive himself as to the cause of her annoyance. "It was a borrowed book, and I can hardly return it in this condition. It is really vexatious," she said, wondering how to lead the conversation back most judiciously. She might also have succeeded, but that, because fate seemed against her, a passenger, who knew them both and strolled by, nodded to Geoffrey.

"I have been looking for you, Thurstan, and if Mrs Leslie, accepting my excuses, can spare you for a few minutes, I have something important to tell you," he said. "Wouldn't have disturbed you, but we'll be alongside Vancouver wharf very shortly."

Millicent could only bow in answer, and after an apologetic glance in her direction, Geoffrey followed the passenger.

"Mrs Leslie's a handsome woman, though one would guess she had a temper of her own. Perhaps you didn't notice it, but she just looked daggers at you when you let that book get away," observed his companion, and smiled when Geoffrey answered,—

"Presumably, you didn't take all this trouble to acquaint me with that fact?"

"No," said the other, with a whimsical gesture. "It was something much more interesting—about the agitation some folks are trying to whoop up against your partner. I'm a married man, with sufficient

## His Master Purpose

opportunities for studying the vagaries of feminine character already."

Geoffrey found the information of so much interest that the steamer was sweeping through the pine-shrouded Narrows which forms the gateway of Vancouver's land-locked harbour when he returned to Millicent, with English Jim following discreetly behind him.

"I am sorry that as we are half-an-hour late, I shall barely have time to keep an important business appointment," he said. "However, as the Sound boat does not sail immediately, my assistant, Mr Gillow, will be able to look after your baggage, and secure a good berth for you. You will get hold of the purser, and see Mrs Leslie is made comfortable in every way before you follow me, Gillow. I shall not want you for an hour or two."

Millicent smiled on the assistant, and the latter took his place beside her, when, as the steamer ran alongside the wharf, his employer hurried away. English Jim was a young, good-looking man of some education, and since his promotion from the cook-shed, had indulged himself in a former weakness for tasteful apparel. He had also, though Thurstan did not notice it, absorbed just sufficient alcoholic stimulant to render him vivacious in speech without betraying the reason for it, and Millicent, who found him considerably more amusing than his master, wondered if, since she had failed with the one, she might not succeed with the other. English Jim no more connected her with the servant of the corporation whose interests were opposed to Savine's than he remembered the brass baggage checks in his pocket. His gratified vanity blinded him to anything beside the pleasure of being seen in his stylish companion's company.

He found a sunny corner for her beside one of the big Sound steamer's paddle casings, from which she could look across the blue waters of the forest-girt inlet, brought up a chair and some English

## The Infatuation of English Jim

papers, and after Millicent had chatted with him graciously, was willing to satisfy her curiosity to the utmost when she said with a smile, "You are a confidential assistant of Mr Thurstan's? He is an old friend of mine, and knowing his energy, I dare say he works you very hard."

"Hard is scarcely an adequate term, madam," answered English Jim. "Nothing can tire my respected chief, and unfortunately, he expects us all to equal him. He found me occupation—writing his letters—until 1 A.M. this morning and, I believe, must have remained awake himself until it was almost light, making drawings which I have had the pleasure of poring over, all the way across. Don't you think, madam, that it is a mistake to work so hard, that one has never leisure for the serene contemplation which is one of the—one of the best things in life. Besides, people who do so, are also apt to deprive others of their opportunities."

"Perhaps so, though I hardly think Mr Thurstan would agree with you. For instance"—said Millicent, finding his humour infectious, for English Jim could gather all the men in camp about him, when half in jest and half in earnest he commenced one of his discourses.

"These!" was the answer, and the speaker thrust his hand into his jacket pocket. "If Mr Thurstan had not been of such tireless nature, I might have found leisure to admire the beauty of this most entrancing coast scenery, instead of puzzling over weary figures in a particularly stuffy saloon."

He held up a large handful of papers as he spoke, glanced at them disdainfully, and pointing vaguely across the inlet, continued, "Is not an hour's contemplation of such a prospect better than many days labour?"

Millicent laughed outright, and, because, though English Jim's voice was even, and his accent crisp and clean, his fingers were not quite so steady as they might have been, one of the papers fluttered unnoticed by either to her feet.

## His Master Purpose

"I feel tempted to agree with you," Millicent said, wishing she need not press on to the main point, for English Jim promised to afford the entertainment she enjoyed. "But a man of your frame of mind must find scanty opportunity for considering such questions among the mountains."

"That is so," was the rueful answer. "We commence our toil at daybreak, and too often continue until midnight. There are times when the monotony jars upon a sensitive mind, as the camp cooking does upon a sensitive palate. But our chief never expects more from us than he will do himself, and is generous in rewarding meritorious service."

"So I should suppose," said Millicent. "Knowing this, you will all be very loyal to him?"

"Every one of us!" and the loyalty of English Jim, who gracefully ignored the inference and fell into the trap, was evident enough. "Of course, we do not always approve of being tired to death, but where our chief considers it necessary, we are content to obey him. In fact, it would not make much difference if we were not," he added, whimsically. "There was, however, one instance of a black sheep, or rather wolf of the contemptible coyote species in sheep's clothing, whom I played a minor part in unmasking. But, naturally, you will not care to hear about this?"

"I should, exceedingly. Did I not say that I am one of Mr Thurstan's oldest friends? I should like to hear about the disguised coyote very much. I presume you do not mean a real one, and are speaking figuratively?"

Gillow was flattered by the glance she cast upon him, and, remembering only that this gracious lady was one of his employer's friends, proceeded to gratify her by launching into a vivid description of what happened on the night when he dropped the prowler into the river. He had, however, sense enough to conclude with the capture of the man.

"But you have not told me the sequel," said

## The Infatuation of English Jim

Millicent. "Did you lynch the miscreant in accordance with the traditional customs of the West, or how did Mr Thurstan punish him? He is not a man who lightly forgives an injury."

"No," said Gillow, rashly. "Against my advice, though my respected employer is difficult to reason with, he kept the rascal in camp, both feeding and paying him well."

"You surprise me. I should have expected a more dramatic *finale*," and Millicent's tone might have deceived a much more clever man who did not know her husband's position. "Why did he do so?"

There were, however, limits to English Jim's communicativeness, and he answered, "Mr Thurstan did not tell me, and it is not always wise to ask him injudicious questions."

Millicent, having learned what she desired to know, rested content with this, and chatted on other subjects until the big bell clanged, and the whistle shrieked out its warning. Then she dismissed her companion with her thanks, and the last she saw of him was an excited man held back by a policeman as he struggled to scale a lofty railing while the steamer slid clear of the wharf. He waved an arm in the air shouting frantically, and through the thud of paddles she caught the disjointed sentences, "Very sorry. Forgot baggage checks—all your boxes here. Leave first steamer—sending checks by mail!"

"It is impossible for us to turn back, madam," said the purser Millicent appealed to. "The baggage will, no doubt, follow the day after tomorrow."

"But that gentleman has my ticket, and doesn't know my address!" protested the unfortunate passenger, and the purser answered,—

"I really cannot help it, but I will telegraph to any of your friends from the first way-port we call at, madam."

When the steamer had vanished behind the



## His Master Purpose

stately pines shrouding the Narrows, English Jim sat down upon a timber-head and swore a little at what he called his luck, before he uneasily recounted the folded papers in his wallet.

"A pretty mess I've made of it all, and there'll be no end of trouble if Thurstan hears of this," he said aloud, so that a loafing porter heard and grinned. "I'll write a humble letter—but, confound it, I don't know where she's going to, and now here is one of those distressful tracings missing. It must have been that old sketch of Savine's, and Thurstan will never want it, while nobody but a draughtsman could make head or tail of the thing. Anyway, I'll get some dinner before I decide what is best to be done."

While Gillow endeavoured to enjoy his dinner, and, being an easy-going man, partially succeeded, Millicent, who had picked up a folded paper, leaned upon the steamer's rail with it open in her hand.

"This is Greek to me, but I suppose it is of value. I will keep it, and perhaps give it back to Geoffrey," she said. "The game was amusing, but I feel horribly mean, and whether I shall tell Harry or not depends very much upon his behaviour."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BURSTING OF THE SLUICE

ONE morning of early summer, Geoffrey Thurstan lay neither asleep, nor wholly awake, inside his double tent. The canvas was partly drawn open, and from his camp-cot he could see a streak of golden sunlight grow broader across the valley, while rising in fantastic columns the night mists rolled away. The smell of dew-damped cedars mingled with the faint aromatic odours of wood smoke, and the clamour of frothing water quivered through the sweet cool air, for the river was roaring down swollen by melted snow. Geoffrey lay still, breathing in the glorious freshness, drowsily content. All had gone smoothly with the works, at least, during the last month or two, while each time she rode down to camp with her father from the mountain ranch, Helen had spoken to him with unusual kindness. Savine would, when well enough, spend an hour in Geoffrey's tent, but while some of his suggestions were characterised by his former genius, most betrayed a serious weakening of his mental powers, and it was apparent that he grew rapidly frailer, physically.

Geoffrey found something very soothing in the river's song, and, yielding to temptation for once, turned his head from the growing light to indulge in another half-hour's slumber, when a discordant note, jarring through the deep-toned harmonies, struck his ears, which were quick to distinguish between the bass roar of the cañon and the higher-pitched calling of the rapid at its entrance. What





## His Master Purpose

had caused it he could not tell, but he was dressed and striding down into the camp when Mattawa Tom and Gillow came running towards him.

"Sluice number six has busted, and the water's going in over Hudson's ranch," shouted the former. "I've started all the men there's room for heaving dirt in, but the river's going through in spite of them."

Geoffrey asked no questions, but ran at full speed through the camp, shouting orders as he went, and presently stood breathless upon a tall bank of raw red earth. On one side the green-stained river went frothing past; on the other a muddy flood spouted through a breach, and already a shallow lake was spreading fast across the cleared land, licking up long rows of potato haulm and timothy grass. Men swarmed like bees about the sloping side of the bank, hurling down earth and shingle into the aperture, but a few moments' inspection convinced Geoffrey that more heroic measures were needed and that they laboured in vain. So, raising his hand, he shouted and, while the clatter of shovels ceased, quietly surveyed the few poor fields rancher Hudson had won from the swamp. His lips were pressed tight together, and his brows wrinkled down.

"There's only one thing to be done. Open two more sluice gates, Tom," he said.

"You'll drown out the whole clearing," ventured the foreman, and Geoffrey nodded.

"Exactly! Can't you see the river will tear all this part of the dyke away unless we equalise the pressure on both sides of it? Go ahead at once and get it done."

The man from Mattawa wondered at the bold order, but his master demanded swift obedience and he proceeded to execute it, while Geoffrey stood fast watching two more huge sheets of froth leap out. He knew that very shortly rancher Hudson's low-level possessions would be buried under several feet of water.

## The Bursting of the Sluice

"It's done, sir, and a blamed bad job it is!" said the foreman, returning; and Geoffrey asked, "How did it happen?"

"Sluice gate wasn't strong enough, river rose a foot yesterday, and she just busted. I was around bright and early and found her splitting. Got a line round the pieces—they're floating beneath you."

"Heave them up!" said Geoffrey.

He was obeyed, and for a few minutes glanced at the timber frame with a puzzled expression, then turned to Gillow, saying, "You know I condemned that mode of scarting, and the whole thing's too light. What carpenters made it?"

"It's one of Mr Savine's gates, sir. I've got the drawing for it somewhere," was the answer, and Geoffrey frowned.

"Then you will keep that fact carefully to yourself," he said. "It is particularly unfortunate. This is about the only gate I have not overhauled personally, but one cannot quite see to everything, and naturally the breakage takes place at that especial point."

"Very good, sir," said Gillow. "Things generally do happen in just that way. Here's rancher Hudson coming, and he looks tolerably angry."

The man who strode along the dyke looked positively furious, which was hardly surprising, considering that he owned the flooded property, and the workmen, who now leaned upon their shovels, waited for the meeting between him and their master in the expectation of amusement.

"What in the name of thunder do you mean by turning your infernal river loose on my ranch?" commenced the newcomer, and Thurstan frowned.

"May I suggest that you try to master your temper and consider the case coolly before you ask any further questions."

"Consider it coolly!" shouted the other. "Coolly! when the blame water's washing out my good potatoes by the hundred bushel, and slooshing mud

## His Master Purpose

and shingle all over my hay. Great Columbus! I'll make things red hot for you."

"See here!" and there were signs that Thurstan was losing his temper. "What we have done was most unfortunately necessary, but, while I regret it at least as much as you do, you will not be a loser financially. As soon as the river falls, we'll run off the water, measure up the flooded land, and pay you current prices for the crop at average acre yield. As you will thus sell it without gathering or hauling to market, it's a fair offer."

Most of the forest ranchers in that region would have closed with the offer forthwith, but there were reasons why the one in question, who was moreover an obstinate, cantankerous man, should seize the opportunity to harass Thurstan.

"It's not half good enough for me," he said. "How'm I going to make sure you won't play the same trick again, while it's tolerably certain you can't keep on paying up for damage done for ever. Then when you're cleaned out where'll I be? This scheme which you'll never put through's a menace to the whole valley, and—"

"You'll be rich, I hope, by that time, and meanwhile, if you'll confine yourself to your legitimate grievance or come along to my tent I'll talk to you," said Geoffrey. "If, on the other hand, you take upon yourself to cast doubt upon my financial position or predict my failure before my men, I'll take decided measures to stop you. You have my word that you will be repaid every cent's worth of damage done, and that should be enough for any reasonable person."

"It's not—not enough for me by a long way," shouted the rancher. "I'll demand a Government inspection, I'll—I'll break you."

"Will you show Mr Hudson the quickest and safest way off this embankment, Tom," said Geoffrey, coolly, and there was laughter mingled with growls of approval from the men, as the irate rancher,

## The Bursting of the Sluice

hurling threats over his shoulder, was solemnly escorted along the dyke by the stalwart foreman. He turned before descending, and shook his fist at those who watched him.

"I think you can close the sluices," said Geoffrey, when the foreman returned. "Then set all hands filling this hole in. I want you, Gillow."

"We are going to have trouble," he said, when the latter stood before him in his tent. "Hudson unfortunately is either connected with or in the clutches of our enemies, and he'll try to persuade his neighbours to join him in an appeal to the authorities. Send a messenger off at once with this telegram to Vancouver, but stay—first find me the drawing of the defective gate."

English Jim spent several minutes searching before he answered, "I'm sorry I can't quite lay my hands upon it. It may be in Vancouver, and I'll write a note to the folks down there."

He did so, and when he went out shook his head ruefully. "That confounded sketch must have been the one I lost on board the steamer. However, there is no use meeting trouble half-way by telling Thurstan so until I'm sure beyond a doubt," he said.

Some time had passed, and the greater portion of Hudson's ranch still lay under water when in consequence of representations made by its owner and some of his friends, a Government official armed with full powers to investigate, held an informal court of inquiry in the big store shed, at which most of the neighbouring ranchers beside Geoffrey and Thomas Savine, who brought a lawyer with him, were present.

"I have nothing to do with any claim for damage. If necessary, the sufferers can appeal to the civil courts," said the official. "My business is to ascertain whether, as alleged, the way these operations are conducted endangers the occupied, and unappropriated, Crown lands in this vicinity. I am willing to hear your opinions, gentlemen, beginning with the complainants."

## His Master Purpose

Rancher Hudson was the first to speak, and he said, "No sensible man would need much convincing that it's mighty bad for growing crops to have a full-bore flood turned loose on them. What's the use of raising hay and potatoes for the river to wash away, and it's plain that what has just happened is going to happen again. Before Savine began these dykes the river spread itself all over the lower swamp; now the walls hold it up, and each time it makes a hole in them, our property's most turned into a lake. I'm neither farming for pleasure nor running a salmon hatchery."

There was a hum of approval from the speaker's supporters, whose possessions lay near the higher end of the valley, and dissentient growls from those whose boundaries lay below, while when several of the former had spoken the official said,—

"I hardly think you have cited sufficient to convince an unprejudiced person that the works are a public danger. You have certainly proved that two holdings have been temporarily flooded, but the first speaker pointed out that this was because the river was prevented from spreading all over the lower end of the valley as it formerly did. Now a portion of the district is already under cultivation, and even the area under crop exceeds that of the damaged plots by at least five acres to one."

There was applause from the men whose possessions had been converted into dry land, and Hudson rose, red-faced and indignant, to his feet again. "Has Savine bought up the whole province, Government and all? That's what I'm wanting to know," he said. "What is it we pay taxes to keep you fellows for? To look the other way when the rich man winks, and stand by seeing nothing while he ruins poor settlers' hard-won holdings? I'm a law-abiding man, I am, but I'm going to let nobody tramp on me."

A burst of laughter filled the rear of the building when one of Hudson's supporters pulled him down

## The Bursting of the Sluice

by main force, and held him fast, observing, "You just sit right there, and look wise instead of talking too much. I guess you've said enough already to mix everything up."

The official raised his hand. "I am here to ask questions and not answer them, while any more resembling the last would be calculated to get the inquirer into trouble," he said. "I must also remind Mr Hudson that after one inundation he signed a document signifying his approval of the scheme, and ask him what has caused the change in his opinions."

Again there was laughter and a few derisive comments from the party favouring Thurstan's cause, while one voice was audible above the rest, "Hudson's been buying horses. Some Vancouver speculator's cheque!"

The rancher, shaking off his follower's grasp, bounded to his feet, and glared at the men behind him. "I'll get square with some of you fellows later on," he said; then turning towards the officer, "Just because I'm getting tired of being washed out. When he's had two crops ruined, a man begins to get uneasy about the third one—see?"

"It is a sufficient reason," answered the official. "Now, gentlemen, I gather that some of you have benefited by this scheme. If you have any information to give me, I shall be pleased to hear it."

Several men testified how they had added to their holdings many acres of fertile soil which had once been swamp, and the Crown official said; "I am convinced that two small ranches have been temporarily inundated, and six or seven benefited. So much for that side of the question. I have now to ascertain whether the work is carried out in the most efficient manner, and how many have suffered in minor ways by the constructors' wilful neglect, as the petitioners allege."

Hudson and his comrades testified at length, but each in turn, after making the most of the accidental upset of a barrow-load of earth among their crops, or

## His Master Purpose

the blundering of a steer into a trench, harked to the broken sluice, while, when amid some laugh they concluded, others who favoured Savine set the precautions Thurstan had taken. Then the inquirer turned over his papers, and Thomas Savine whispered to Geoffrey, "It's all in our favour so far, but I'm anxious about that broken sluice. It's a weak point, and he's sure to tackle it."

"Yes," said Geoffrey, whose face was strangely pale. "I am anxious about it, too. Can you suggest anything I should do, Mr Gray?"

The Vancouver lawyer, who had a long experience of somewhat similar disputes, hitched forward his chair, saying, "Not at present. I agree with Savine that the question of the sluice gate may be serious. Allowances are made for unpreventable accidents and force of circumstances, but a defect in the instance of a wholly inefficient appliance or defective workmanship might be most damaging. It is particularly unfortunate it was framed timber of insufficient strength that failed."

Geoffrey made no answer, but Thomas Savine glanced at him keenly, fancied he set his teeth, and the lawyer, turning to the official inquirer, said, "These gentlemen have given you all the information in their power, and if you have finished with them, I would venture to suggest that any technical details of the work concern only Mr Thurstan and yourself."

There was a protest from the assembly, and the officer beckoned for silence before he answered, "Gentlemen seem determined between you to conduct the whole case your own way. I was already about to dismiss with thanks the neighbouring landholders who have assisted me to the best of their ability."

Amid some commotion the store-shed was empty of all but the official, his assistant, and Thurstan's party, and the former, beckoning Geoffrey, held before his astonished eyes a plan of the defective gate. "Do you consider the timbering specified

## The Bursting of the Sluice

sufficient for the strain?" he asked. "I cannot press the question, but it would be judicious of you to answer it."

"No!" said Geoffrey, divided between surprise and dismay.

The drawing was Savine's. He could recognise the figures upon it, but it had evidently been made when the latter was suffering from a badly-clouded brain. The broken gate itself was damaging evidence, but this was worse, for a glance at the design showed him that the artificers who worked from it had, without orders even, slightly increased the dimensions. Any man with a knowledge of mechanical science would condemn it, but, while he had often seen Savine incapable of mental effort of late, this was the first serious blunder he had come across. The mistake would also, he knew, be taken as evidence of sheer incapacity, perhaps, if further inquiry followed, be published broadcast in the papers, and Geoffrey was above all things proud of his professional skill. Still, he had pledged his word to both his partner and his daughter, and there was only one course open to him, if the questions which would follow made it possible.

Meantime the lawyer, leaning forward, whispered to Thomas Savine, and then said aloud, "If that drawing is what it purports to be, it must have been purloined. May we ask accordingly how it came into your possession?"

"One of the complainants forwarded it to me. He said he—obtained—it," was the dry answer. "Under the circumstances, I hesitate to make direct use of it, but by the firm's stamp it appears genuine."

"That Mr Savine could personally be capable of such a mistake as this is impossible on the face of it," said the inquirer's professional assistant. "It is the work of a half-trained man, and suggests two questions, Do you repudiate the plan, and, if you do not, was it made by a responsible person? I presume you have a draughtsman?"



## His Master Purpose

"There is no use repudiating anything that bears our stamp," said Geoffrey, disregarding the lawyer's frown, and looking steadily into the bewildered face of Thomas Savine. "I work out all such calculations and make the sketches myself. My assistant sometimes checks them."

The official, who had heard of the young contractor's reputation for daring skill, also looked puzzled as he said, "From what you say the only two people who could have made the blunder are Mr Savine and yourself. I am advised, and agree with the suggestion, that the former could never have done so. From what I have heard, I should have concluded it would have been equally impossible with you ; but I can't help saying that the inference is plain."

"Is not all this beside the question?" interposed the lawyer. "The junior partner admits the plan was made in the firm's offices, and that should be sufficient."

Geoffrey held himself stubbornly in hand while the officer answered that he desired to ascertain if it was the work of a responsible person. He knew that this blunder would be recorded against him, and necessitate several brilliant successes to obliterate, but his resolution never faltered, and when the legal adviser, laying a hand upon his arm, whispered something softly, shook off his grasp.

"The only two people responsible are Mr Savine and myself—and you suggested the inference was plain," he said.

Here Gillow, who had been fidgeting nervously, opened his lips as though about to say something, but closed them again when his master, moving one foot beneath the table, trod hard upon his toe.

"I am afraid I should hardly mend matters by saying I am sorry it is," said the official, drily. "However, a mistake by a junior partner does not prove your firm incapable of high-class work, and I hardly think you will be troubled by further interference in the meantime when my report is made.

## The Bursting of the Sluice

My superiors may warn you — but I must not anticipate. It is as well you answered frankly, as otherwise I should have concluded you were endeavouring to make your profits at the risk of the community, but I cannot help saying that the admission may be prejudicial to you, Mr Thurstan, if you ever apply individually for a Government contract. Here is the drawing. It is your property."

Geoffrey stretched out his hand for it, but Savine was too quick for him, and when he thrust it into his pocket, the former, rising abruptly, stalked out of the room. Gillow, who followed and overtook him, said, "I can't understand this at all, sir. Mr Savine made that drawing. I know his arrows on the measurement lines, and I was just going to say so when you stopped me. I have a confession to make. I believe I dropped that paper out of my wallet on board the steamer."

"You have a very poor memory, Gillow," and Thurstan stared the speaker out of countenance. "I fear your eyes deceive you at times as well. You must have lost it somewhere else. In any case, if you mention the fact to anybody else or repeat that you recognise Mr Savine's handiwork, I shall have to look for an assistant who does not lose the documents he is entrusted with."

Gillow went away growling to himself, but perfectly satisfied with both his eyesight and memory, while Thurstan had hardly dismissed him than Thomas Savine approached, holding out the sketch.

"See here, Geoffrey," he commenced, and one glance at the speaker was sufficient for Thurstan, who stopped him.

"Are you also coming to torment me about that confounded thing? Give it me at once," he said.

He snatched the drawing from Savine's hand, tore it into fragments, and stamped them into the mould. "Now that's done with at last!" he said.

"No," was the answer. "There's no saying where

## His Master Purpose

a thing like this will end if public mischief-makers get hold of it. You have your future, which means your professional reputation, to think of. In all human probability my poor brother can't last very long, and this may handicap you for years. I cannot—"

"Damn my professional reputation! Can't you believe your ears?" Geoffrey broke in.

"I'm not blind yet, and would sooner trust my eyes," was the dry answer. "Nobody shall persuade me I don't know my own brother's figures. There are limits, Geoffrey, and neither Helen nor I would hold our peace about this."

"Listen to me!" and Geoffrey's face was as hard as flint. "I see I can't bluff you as easily as the Government man, but I give you fair warning that if you attempt to make use of your suspicions I'll find means of checkmating you. Just supposing you're not mistaken, a young man with any grit in him could live down a dozen similar blunders, and, if he couldn't, what is my confounded personal credit in comparison with what your brother has done for me and my promise to Miss Savine. So far as I can accomplish it, Julius Savine shall honourably wind up a successful career, and if you either reopen the subject or acquaint his daughter, there will be war between you and me. That is the last word I have to say."

"I wonder if Helen knows the grit there is in that man," said Savine, when, seeing all protests were useless, he turned away, divided between compunction and gratitude. Neither did he nor the lawyer succeed in tracing the means by which the drawing fell into hostile hands, while if Geoffrey had his suspicions, he decided it might be better not to follow them up.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE ABDUCTION OF BLACK CHRISTY

THERE were weighty reasons why Christy Black, whose comrades reversed his name and called him Black Christy instead, remained in Thurstan's camp so long as he did. Although a good mechanic, he was by no means fond of manual labour, and had discovered that more profitable occupations were open to an enterprising and not over-scrupulous man, while on the memorable night when Thurstan fished him out of the river, the latter had made it plain that he must earn the somewhat liberal wages he promised to pay him. As a matter of fact, Black had hitherto made the most of his opportunities, and in doing so had brought himself under the ban of the law during an altercation over a disputed mineral claim.

Black, who then called himself by another name, disappeared before an inquiry as to how the body of one of the said claim's owners came into a neighbouring river, and only one comrade, and a mine-floating speculator, who, as often happens, stood behind the humbler disputants, knew or guessed at the events which led up to the fatality. The comrade shortly afterwards vanished, too, but the richer man, who had connived at Black's disappearance, kept a close hand on him, forcing him to act as cat's-paw in several risky operations as the price of his freedom, until the latter, tired of his tyranny, had been glad to tell Thurstan part of the truth and accept his protection. The man whose grip he hoped he had escaped from was the one who had helped Leslie out of a difficulty.

## His Master Purpose

Black found, however, that a life of virtuous toil grew distinctly monotonous, and one morning, when Mattawa Tom's vigilance was slack, departed in search of diversion in the settlement of Red Pine which lay beyond the range. He found congenial society therein, and, unfortunately for himself, went on with a boon companion next morning to a larger settlement beside the railroad track. He purposed to complete the orgie there, and then return to camp. Accordingly it happened that, when afternoon was drawing towards a close, he sat well-contented with himself under the verandah of a rickety wooden saloon, hurling drowsy encouragement at the freighter who was loading rock-boring tools into a big waggon to which several yoke of oxen were attached. He also wondered how far his remaining dollar would go towards assuaging a thirst which steadily increased, and two men who leaned against the waggon chuckled as they watched him. The hands of one were busy about the brass cap which decorated the hub of the wheel, but neither Black nor the teamster noticed this. He had seen one of the men before, for the pair had loafed about the district prospecting for minerals, so they said, and had twice visited Thurstan's camp.

It was a pity Black had absorbed sufficient alcohol to confuse his memory, or when the men strolled towards him he might have recognised the one whose hat was drawn well down. As it was, he greeted them affably.

"Nice weather for picnicking in the woods. Not found that galena yet? I guess somebody in the city is paying you by the week," he said.

"That's about the size of it!" and the speaker laughed. "But we've pretty well found what we wanted, and we're pulling out with the Pacific express. There don't seem very much left in that glass. Anything the matter with filling it up with me?"

## The Abduction of Black Christy

"I'm not proud," was the answer. "Open to drink with any man who'll set them up for me," and when the prospector called the bar-tender, Black proceeded to prove his willingness practically.

Nothing moved in the unpaved street of the sleepy settlement, when the slow-footed oxen and lurching waggon had lumbered away. The sun beat down upon it pitilessly, and the drowsy scent of cedars mingled with the odours of baking dust which eddied in little spirals and got into the loungers' throats. The bar-tender was, however, liberal with his ice, and Black became confidential under his mixtures' influence until, when he had assured them of his undying friendship, one of the prospectors asked,—

"What's a smart man like you muling rocks around in a river-bed for, anyway? Can't you strike nothing better down to the cities?"

"No," said Black, thickly. "Couldn't strike a job nohow when I left them. British Columbia played out—no dollars to take me to California."

"Well," said the prospector, winking at his comrade, "there is something we might put you on to. The first question is, what kin you do?"

According to Black's not over coherent answer, there was little he could not do excellently, while, when he had enumerated his capabilities, the other man said,—

"I guess that's sufficient. Come right back with us to 'Frisco and we'll have a few off days before we start you. This is no country for a live man, anyway."

Black nodded sagaciously and tried hard to think. He was afraid of Thurstan, but more so of the other man connected with the Enterprise Company, while in San Francisco he would be beyond the reach of either, and that city offers many delights to a person of his tastes with somebody else willing to pay expenses. The latter fact was plain at least.

"I'll come," he said thickly. "So long as you're

## His Master Purpose

gotsh dollars go right round the earth with either of you."

"Good man!" said the prospector. "Bring along another jugful, bar-tender."

The attendant glanced at the trio admiringly, for the speaker was plainly sober, and he knew how many dollars Black had paid him already, but he went back to his bottles, and there was nobody to see the other prospector, who had kept himself in the background, pour something from a little phial beneath his hand, into Black's liquor.

"Not quitsh good as last one. I know 'Frisco. Great time at China Joe's, you an' me," said the latter, and presently collapsed with his head upon the table, snoring heavily.

"Your climate has been too much for him," said one of the remaining pair, when the saloon-keeper came in. "Say, hadn't you better help us heave him in somewhere he can sleep, unless you'd prefer to keep him as an advertisement?"

It was done with some difficulty, and two hours later, Black, who managed to knock over a table and trayful of glasses on his way out of the saloon, was wheeled on a baggage-truck into the station, where half the inhabitants of the settlement assembled to see him off. The big cars were already clanging down the track, when a tall man on a lathered horse appeared among the scattered pines on the shoulder of the hill above the settlement, and a bystander said, "Thurstan's foreman coming round for some of his packages. As usual he's in an almighty hurry. That place is 'most as steep as a roof, and he's coming down it at a gallop."

The prospectors glanced at each other, and one of them said, "Lend me a hand, somebody, to heave our sick partner aboard."

Black was unceremoniously deposited upon the platform of the nearest car, where he sat blinking vacantly at the assembly, while the conductor, leaning out from the door of the baggage-car, looked

## The Abduction of Black Christy

back towards the rider clattering through a dust cloud down the street, as he asked, "Anybody else beside the tired man? Is that fellow yonder coming?"

"No," said the prospector. "He's only wanting one of those cases you've just dumped out. Likes to fancy his time's precious. I know him."

The conductor waved his hand, the big bell clanged, and the train had just rolled with a rattle over a trestle ahead, when Mattawa Tom, grimed with thick red dust, flung himself down beside the agent's office from a steaming horse.

"Has a dark-faced thief in a plug hat with two holes in the top of it, gone out on the cars?" he shouted, and the spectators admitted that such an individual had.

"Why didn't you come in two minutes earlier, Tom?" one of them said. "He lit out with two strangers. Has he been stealing something?"

"He's been doing worse, and I'd have been in on time, but that I stopped ten minutes to help freighter Louis cut the two live oxen left him loose," said the foreman, breathlessly, and added in answer to the questions hurled at him, "One wheel came off his waggon going down the Clearwater Trail, and the whole blame outfit pitched over into a ravine. There's several thousand dollars' worth of our boring-machines smashed up, and Louis, who has pretty well split his head, is cussing the man who took the cotter out of his wheel hub."

The two prospectors were heartily tired of their charge by the time they passed him off as the sick employee of an American firm, at the nearest station to the Washington border. When Black showed signs of waking up he was, however, soothed with further medicated liquor, and his guardians, who had several times high words with the conductor, at last unloaded him in a station hewn out of the forests encircling Puget Sound, where they managed to hoist him into a spring waggon. Black leaned against



## His Master Purpose

one of them, feeling distressfully unwell. His head throbbed, his vision was hazy and his throat dried up, but, blinking down at the rows of wooden houses among the firs, and the tall spars of vessels behind them, he said, "This isn't 'Frisco—not half big enough. Somebody made mistake somewhere. Say! Lemme out; I'm going back to the depot."

"You're coming along with us," was the decided answer. "Sit down at once before we make you."

Black slowly doubled up a still formidable fist, and grasping a rail, lurched to and fro unsteadily. "Lemme out 'fore I kill somebody. Claim rightsh of British citizenship," he said.

"You'll get them if you're not careful," was the sardonic answer, and the speaker jerked Black's feet from under him. "I was told to remind you if you made trouble that a sheriff on this side of the frontier had some papers describing you. There's one or two patrolmen yonder handy."

"It was an accident," said Black, endeavouring to pull his scattered wits together.

"Juss so!" was the answer, given with a gesture of indifference. "I was only told a name for the patrolmen, and to remind you that a man, who knows all about it, has got his eye on you."

Black leered upon him with drunken cunning, then his face grew stolid, and he said nothing further until the waggon drew up before a door in a by-street, hung across with quaint signboards in Chinese characters. It opened and closed behind him when his companions knocked, and Black, who recognised a curious sour smell, choked out, "Gimme long drink of ice watah!"

He drained the cool draught that was brought him, then flinging himself on a pile of matting in a corner of a dim room, sank forthwith into slumber. He had intended to pretend to do so, and lie awake and think, but his custodians had arranged things differently, and Black's wits were not working up to their usual power.

## The Abduction of Black Christy

Now even at present, whenever railroad extension or mining enterprise provides high wages for all strong enough to earn them and crews desert wholesale, seamen are occasionally shipped in a very irregular fashion from the ports of the Pacific slope. At the time Black was brought into one of them, the purveying of drugged and kidnapped mariners had once more risen to be almost a recognised profession.

It accordingly happened that when the unfortunate Black first became clearly conscious of anything again, he heard the gurgle of sliding water close beside his head, and, opening his eyes, caught sight of a smoky lamp that reeled to and fro, in very erratic fashion. Moisture dripped from the beams above him, and there was a sickly smell permeated with an odour which seemed familiar. Black, who had been to sea before, decided it was the aroma of bilge water. Then rows of wooden shelves tenanted with recumbent figures, which sank down at an angle before his aching eyes, became discernible, and he started with dismay to the full recognition of the fact that he was in a vessel's forecabin. Somebody, or something, was also pounding upon the scuttle overhead.

A black gap opened above him, a rush of cold night wind swept down, followed by a gruff hail, "Turn out, watch below, and help get sail upon her. Stir round before I put a move on to you!"

Men scrambled from the wooden shelves growling as they did so. Two lost their balance on the heaving floor, went down headlong, and lay where they fell, while, when a man in long boots floundered down the ladder, Black sat up in his bunk.

"Now there's going to be trouble. Some blame rascals have run me off aboard a lumber ship," he said.

"Correct!" observed a man, struggling into an oilskin jacket close beneath him. "You're blame well shanghai'd like the rest of us, and as the mate's a rustler, you've got to make the best of it."


## His Master Purpose

"Hillo! What's the matter with you? Not feeling spry this morning, or is it hot water you're waiting for?" said the latter worthy, jerking Black out of his bunk as he spoke. "Great Columbus! What kind of a stiff do you call yourself? Up you go!"

Black went, with all the expedition he was capable of, and blundering out through the scuttle stood shivering on a slant of wet and slippery deck. A brief survey showed him that he was on board a full-rigged ship, timber laden, about to be cast off by a tug with a fresh breeze abeam. Looking forward he could see dark figures hanging from the high-pointed bowsprit that rose and dipped, and beyond them the lights of a tug reeling athwart a strip of white-streaked sea. Mountains dimly discernible towered above one quarter, and he fancied it was a little before daybreak. Odd bursts of spray came hurtling in through the foremast shrouds, and the whine and rattle of running wire and chain fell from the windy blackness overhead which was also filled with the banging of loosened canvas. Glancing aloft he watched the great arches of the half-sheeted topsails swell blackly out and then collapse again with a thunderous flap. Somebody was shouting from the slanted top-gallant-yard that swung in a wide arc above them, but Black had no time for further inspection.

"Lay aloft and loose maintopsails! Are you figuring we brought you here to admire the scenery?" a hoarse voice said.

Half-dazed and sullenly savage Black had still sense enough to reflect that it would be little use expecting the harassed mate to listen to reason then, and, clawing his way up the ratlines he laid his chest upon the maintopsail-yard and worked his way out to the lower end of the long inclined spar. Here he hung with the footrope jammed against his heel, still faint and dizzy, feeling for the gasket that held the canvas to the yard, which swung him with itself through the blackness across a space of tumbling foam. There were other men



## The Abduction of Black Christy

behind him, for he could hear them swearing and coughing until a black wall of banging canvas sank beneath him when somebody roared, "Sheet her home!"

Then a hail came down across the waters from the tug, and there was a loud splash beneath the bows, while shadowy figures, that howled a wierd ditty, rose and fell black against the foam-flecked sea on the dripping forecastle, as they hove the hawser in. Nobody had missed Black, who now sat astride the yard watching the tug as the ship, listing over further and commencing to hurl the spray in clouds about her plunging bows, gathered way. The steamboat would slide past very close alongside, and he saw a last chance of escape. Moving out to the very yard-arm he clutched the lee-brace which rope led diagonally downwards to the vessel's depressed rail and looked below a moment, bracing himself for the perilous attempt.

The tug was close abreast of the ship's forecastle now, evidently waiting with engines stopped until she should pass her, the crew, judging by their voices, were still heaving in the cable or loosing the top-gallants, and froth boiled almost level with the depressed rail. Black was a poor swimmer, but he could swim a little, and if the tug did not start her engines during the next few seconds she must drive close down on him. Otherwise—but filled with the hope of escape and the lust of revenge he was willing to take the risk.

He hooked one knee round the brace, gripped it between his ankles and slackened the grip of his hands. The topsails slid away from him, the spray rushed up below, his feet struck the rail, and the next moment he was down in utter blackness, conscious of a shock of icy cold. He rose gasping, swung round buffeted in the vessel's eddying wake, but there was no shouting on board her, and he struck out with a choking cry for the black shape of the tug, now only a few fathoms away. Somebody heard and flung down a line. He clutched at it and, by

## His Master Purpose

good fortune, grasped it, and finally was drawn on board by the aid of a long boathook, head downwards, and hauled, dripping, before the skipper.

"Did you fall or jump in?" asked the latter.

"I jumped," said Black, putting a bold face on it, and the master of the towboat laughed.

"Shanghaied, I guess!" he said. "Well, I don't blame you for showing your grit, and the master of that lumber waggon is a blame avaricious insect. Beat us down until all we got out of him will hardly pay the coal, he did. So if you slip ashore quietly when we tie up, he'll think you pitched over making sail, and I'll keep my mouth shut."

Accordingly it happened that next morning Black, who left the wooden city before daylight, on his feet, sat down to consider his next move, on the edge of the bush.

"There's one thing tolerably certain, Black Christy's drowned, and he'll just stop drowned until it suits him," he said. "Next, though he's not over fond of it, there's lots of work for a good carpenter in this country and newspapers are cheap. So when it's worth his while to strike in with the Thurstan Company and get even with the other side he'll probably hear of it."

He also laughed a little as he once more read the message on a strip of pulpy paper somebody had slipped into his pocket.

"You are going to China for your health, and you had better stop there if you want to keep clear of trouble."

Then Black Christy got upon his feet again and departed into the bush, where he wandered for several weeks, building fences and splitting shingles for the ranchers in return for food and shelter, until he found work and wages at a saw-mill.

Shortly after he did so the director who held

## The Abduction of Black Christy

Leslie's receipt sat talking with the latter in his handsome offices. A newspaper lay open on the table before him, and the director smiled as he read, "Ship, *Maria Carmony*, timber laden for China, meeting continuous headwinds after sailing from this port, put into Cosechas, Cal., for shelter, and her master reported the loss of a seaman when making sail in the Straits of San Juan. The man's name was T. Slater, and must have been a stranger, as nobody appears to have known him in this city."

"Those fellows haven't managed it badly," he commented. "Anyway, there's an end of him."

"They told me they had some trouble over it, and I gave them fifty dollars extra," said Leslie. "They used the hint you mentioned—said it worked well. But these two are always likely to turn up, unfortunately."

"It wouldn't count," said the other. "You will have to bluff them off if they do. Deny the whole thing—nobody would believe them—it's quite easy. It would have been different with that confounded Black, for he would have had Thurstan's testimony. The joke of the whole thing is, that although he knew I held evidence which would pretty well hang him with a mining jury, it's tolerably certain Black never did the thing he was wanted for."

So the two parties interested remained contented, and only Thurstan was left bewildered and furious at the loss of a witness who might be valuable to him, besides the destruction of machinery which, having been made specially for him in England, could not be replaced for months. Neither did it ever strike his subordinate, English Jim, that he had furnished the clue which led to the abduction of the missing man.

## CHAPTER XIX

### UNDER THE STANLEY PINES

IT was a pleasant afternoon when Millicent Leslie stood in the scroll-work portico of her wooden villa, which looked upon the inlet from a sunny ridge just outside Vancouver city. Like the rest of the residences scattered about, the dwelling quaintly suggested a doll's house. It was so diminutively pretty with its carved verandah, bright green lattices, and spotless white paint picked out with shades of paler green and yellow. Flowers filled tiny borders, and to complete the resemblance small firs, spared by the axe, stood rigid and sombre behind it with the appearance of trees cunningly graven out of timber. With clear sunshine beating upon it and the blue waters sparkling close below, it was so daintily attractive that one might almost suppose its inhabitants could carry neither care nor evil humour across the threshold, but there was disgust and weariness in Millicent's eyes as she glanced from the little pony-carriage waiting at the gate to her husband leaning against a pillar.

Leslie was evidently in a complacent frame of mind, and did not notice his wife's expression, for there was a smile upon his somewhat puffy face which suggested pride of possession. It was justifiable, for Mrs Leslie was still a distinctly handsome woman, and knew how to dress herself.

"You will meet very few women who excel you, and the team is unique," he said. "Drive round by some of the big stores and let folk see you before you turn into the park. Since that affair of Thurstan's I am almost beginning to grow proud of you."

## Under the Stanley Pines

"Isn't it somewhat late in the day?" was the answer, and Millicent's tone was chilly. "If you had wished to pay me a compliment that was not intended ironically, it would have been wiser to omit all reference to the subject you mentioned. It is done now—and heaven knows why I told you—but I can't thank you for reminding me of a deed I am ashamed of. Further, I understood the ponies were for my pleasure, and I have stooped far enough in your interest without displaying myself as an advertisement of a prosperity which does not exist."

The man laughed unpleasantly, noticing the flash in the speaker's eyes before he answered, "Perhaps it is, but as regards your last remark, to pretend you have achieved prosperity is, so far as I can see, the one way to attain it—and I have a promising scheme in view. It is not a particularly pleasant part to play, and there was a time when it appeared very improbable that either of us would be forced, as you say, to stoop to it. Neither was it my ambition which brought about the necessity. As to the ponies—I had fancied they might do their part, too, but they are a reward for services rendered in finding me a clue to the missing-man mystery. Nobody need know that they're not quite our own. Now you have got them, isn't it slightly unfair to blame me because you were willing to earn them?"

"I suppose so," said Millicent. "Still, I can't help remarking that you take the man's usual part of blaming the woman for whatever happens. To-day I will not drive through the city, but straight into the park."

Leslie said nothing further, but followed his wife to the gate, then turned, on his way to his office, and looked after her with a frown as she rattled her team along the uneven road. She was a vain and covetous woman with a bias towards intrigue, but there had been times since her marriage when she despised herself, and as a natural consequence blamed her husband. Sometimes she also hated Thurstan,



## His Master Purpose

though more often she was sensible of vague regrets, and grew morbid thinking of what might have been. Now she flushed a little as she glanced at the ponies and remembered they were the price of treachery. The beasts were innocent, but she found satisfaction in making them feel the sting of the whip. Then she turned and looked back at the city.

It rose in terraces above the broad inlet, a maze of wooden buildings, giving place to stone, hung over by a wire network raised high on lofty poles which, springing from the sidewalks would alone have destroyed the beauty of a much fairer city, backed by sombre forest over which at intervals towered the blasted skeleton of some gigantic pine. Millicent felt she detested both the city, with its crude mingling of primitive simplicity and Western luxury, and the life she lived in it. It was a life of pretence and struggle, in which she suffered bitter mortifications daily. Presently she reined the team in to a walk under the cool shade of the tract of primeval forest which, with a wisdom not common in the West, the inhabitants of Vancouver have left unspoiled as Nature made it, for an incomparable pleasance. A few drives have been cut through it, and between the long rows of giant trunks she could catch at intervals the silver shimmer of the Straits. Then there was only restful shadow and silence, intensified by the soft thud of hoofs, and a dim perspective of tremendous columns whose great branches interlocked, forming arches for the roof of sombre green very far above.

Even Millicent felt the spell of the silence, and sighed remembering how the lover she had discarded once pleaded that she would help him in a life of healthful labour beyond the reach of the petty cares of civilisation. She almost regretted she had not consented. Now she was tied to a man she despised, and who had put her, so she considered, to open shame. She could not help comparing his weak, greedy, yet venomous nature, with the other's courage, clean purpose and transparent honesty.

## Under the Stanley Pines

"I was a fool, ten times a fool; but it is too late," she said, and then tightening her grip on the reins started with surprise. The man her thoughts had strayed to leaned against a hemlock with his eyes fixed on her face. It was the first time they had met since she played the part of Delilah, and, in spite of her customary self-command, Millicent betrayed her agitation. A softer mood was upon her and she had the grace to be ashamed. Still, it appeared desirable to discover whether he suspected her.

"I was quite startled to see you, Geoffrey, but very glad. It is almost too hot for walking. Won't you let me drive you?" she said.

If Geoffrey hesitated Millicent at least noticed no sign of it beyond that he was slow in answering. He was conscious that Mrs Leslie looked just then a singularly attractive companion, but she was also the wife of another man, and of late he had felt a vague alarm at the confidence she seemed inclined to exchange with him. Nevertheless, he could find no excuse at the moment which would not suggest a desire to avoid her, and with a word of thanks took his place at her side.

"I came down to consult my friend, Mr Thomas Savine, on business," he said. "Had one or two other matters to attend to, and promised to overtake him and his wife during their stroll. I must have missed him. What a pretty team! Have you had them long?"

Millicent's well-gloved fingers closed somewhat viciously upon the whip, for the casual question was unfortunate, but she smiled as she answered and chatted gaily until, in an interlude, Thurstan felt prompted to say,—

"Coincidences are sometimes striking, are they not? You remember, the last time we met, suggesting that I was fortunate in having no enemies among the mountains?"

"Yes," said the woman, shrinking a little, "I do—

## His Master Purpose

but do you know that it makes one shiver to talk about glaciers and snow on such a perfect day."

A man of keener perceptions would, reading the speaker's face, have changed the subject at once, and Millicent deserved that he should do so. It was a good impulse which prompted her to place herself beyond the reach of further temptation. Geoffrey, however, was unobservant that afternoon.

"I am certainly tired of them myself, and was merely going to say that, shortly after I last talked with you, I discovered another instance of an unknown enemy's ingenuity. A waggon we had chartered upset down a steep ravine, and several costly machines I had brought out from England, and can hardly replace, were smashed to pieces."

"Ah!" said Millicent, staring straight before her. "What a pity! Still accidents of that description must be fairly common where the mountain roads are bad?"

"They are; but this was not an accident. We found that somebody had pulled out the cotter or iron pin which held the waggon wheel on."

"Did any of your own men do it?" asked Millicent, concealing her eagerness, and Thurstan answered with pride in his tone,—

"My own men risk their lives freely almost every day in my service. There is not one among them capable of treachery—now. We made tolerably certain it was the work of two strangers who hung about the neighbouring settlement and disappeared immediately after the accident."

Millicent's eyes flashed, her white teeth were set together, and, filled with hot indignation against her husband, she lashed the ponies viciously. There were several reasons for what she had done, including a dislike to Miss Savine, but perhaps the greatest was the sordid fear of poverty. Now she saw that her husband had tricked her, and considered she did well to be angry with him. She had stooped to save his position and not enable him to work further injury

## Under the Stanley Pines

against Thurstan. The innocent ponies were his gift, and the smart of the lash she drew across their sleek backs appeared vicarious punishment.

"Have I displeased you?" said Geoffrey.

"No," said Millicent. "Displease me! How could I resent anything you might either say or do. Have I not heaped injury upon you?"

She turned to gaze straight at her companion with a curious glitter in her eyes. Thurstan was bewildered by it and the traces of ill-suppressed passion in her voice, and grew distinctly uneasy. He was glad that one of the ponies showed signs of growing restive under its punishment.

"Steady, Millicent! They're a handsome pair, but not far off bolting, and there's no parapet to yonder bridge," he said.

In place of an answer the woman again flicked one of the beasts viciously with the whip, and next moment the light vehicle lurched forward with a whirr of gravel hurled up by the wheels. The team had certainly bolted, and the road curved sharply to the unguarded bridge over a little creek ahead.

"This is my business," said Geoffrey, wrenching the reins from her grasp. "Sit well back, throw the whip down and clutch the rail fast." Then he stood upright clenching the lines in his hard brown hands. It was, however, evident he could not steer the beasts round the bend, and the fall of a few feet to the rocks beneath the bridge might well, considering the pace they travelled at, be sufficient to account for broken limbs at least.

"Hold fast for your life," he shouted, and let the team run straight on. There was a heavy shock as the light wheels struck a fallen branch on leaving the graded road, a heavy lurch, and Millicent, whose eyes were wide with terror, screamed faintly, while swaying to the jolting, Geoffrey still stood bolt upright driving the team straight ahead down a more open glade of the forest. He knew that the fleshy stems of the fern and soft ground beneath would soon

## His Master Purpose

bring them to a standstill if they did not strike a trunk first.

He was also justified. The going was heavy, and with a plunge or two, the beasts brought up on the edge of a thicket and finally stood fast trembling and snorting. Geoffrey, alighting, soothed them with some difficulty, led them back to the road, and, taking his place again, turned towards his companion. It appeared necessary that he should soothe her, too, for, though generally a self-possessed person, the emotions of the last few minutes had proved too much for Millicent Leslie. She had suffered from compunction, disgust with herself, rage against her husband, and to these there had been added the fear of sudden death.

"It ended better than it might have done," said Geoffrey, awkwardly. "Very sorry, but you must really be careful in using the whip to them. Shall I get down and bring you some water, Millicent? You look faint. The fright has made you ill."

"No," said Millicent, "I am neither; only startled a little—and very grateful," and, perhaps instinctively, she moved a little nearer him when Geoffrey handed her the reins again. He bent his head and smiled reassuringly. Millicent was white in face, and shivered a little—she was also very pretty, and it would have been unkind not to try to comfort her. Whether it was love of power, dislike to her husband, or perhaps something more than this, even the woman was not then sure, but she took full advantage of the position, and the ponies walked undirected, while Geoffrey essayed to chase away her tremors. He bent his head lower towards her, and Millicent smiled at him with apparently shy gratitude.

Then lifting his eyes a moment, he set his teeth, perhaps to check the only language which would have expressed his feelings, as he met the coldly indifferent gaze of Helen, who came towards them in company with Thomas and Mrs Savine. Millicent also saw the trio, and either tempted by jealousy of

## Under the Stanley Pines

the girl or vanity, managed to convey a subtle expression of triumph in her smile of greeting. Possibly neither Thomas Savine nor Geoffrey would have understood its meaning had they seen it, but Helen did, and it was with the very faintest bend of her head she acknowledged Thurstan's, and not his companion's, salutation.

Geoffrey was silent henceforward, but Millicent, who seemed to recover her spirits, chatted gaily and even said flattering things, with a purpose, of Miss Savine.

Meantime Helen felt confused, hurt and angry. It was true she had rejected Thurstan's suit, but she had found his loyalty pleasant, and had believed in his rectitude implicitly. Now a hot colour rose to her very temples as she remembered it was the second time she had seen him under circumstances which suggested that he had transferred the homage offered her to a married woman. She felt the insult as keenly as if he had struck her. The Dominion has not progressed by any means so far in one direction as the great republic to the south of it, neither are friendships or flirtations of the kind looked upon therein as they are in tropical colonies, and there was a good deal of the Puritan in Helen Savine. So she was thankful that a tiny packet slipped from her hand and afforded an opportunity to linger a few moments behind her companions. Still, she would not have dropped it purposely.

"Well, I'm—just rattled. That's Mrs Leslie!" said Thomas Savine. "Thurstan goes straight and steady, but what in the name of—"

His spouse, whose one weakness was medicine, flashed a warning glance at him, and hastened to answer, perhaps for the benefit of Helen who came up just then.

"There is not a straighter man in the Dominion, and one could stake their last cent on the honour of Geoffrey Thurstan. From several things I've heard, I've settled that's just a dangerous woman."

## His Master Purpose

Helen heard, and, knowing her friendship for young engineer, guessed her aunt's motive. explanation would not, in any case, have improved the position much, for if the woman were unprincipled, which she could well believe, should the man who had, of his own will, plotted himself to her—but she flushed again as she refused to follow that line of thought further. Nevertheless she clenched a little hand in a manner that boded for Thurstan when next he sought speech with her. Afterwards she endeavoured to treat the incident with complete indifference, and succeeded in doing so, leaving her uncle only, for in spite of her efforts, he and his carriage expressed outraged dignity. The lady, however, was not in the least deceived, and her eyes twinkled now and then as she chatted on different topics while the party proceeded leisurely toward the city. Still, Thomas Savine regretted that he had left business an hour earlier than usual.

When Leslie returned from his office he found his wife awaiting him with the disdainful look upon her face he had learned to hate.

"What's the matter now, Millicent? Has anything upset your usually pacific temper?" he asked with a sneer.

"Yes," was the direct answer. "When you asked my assistance you, as usual, lied to me. You helped me to trace your confederate, but you told me it was the only way to escape. For once I believed you, which was blindly foolish of me. I met Mr Thurstan, and learned from him that somebody had plotted to destroy his machine. He did not know it was you, and I was very foolish in telling him."

"Don't be a fool, Millicent," said the man. "I am sick of these displays of temper—they don't become you. I tell you I plotted nothing except to get you in my hands again. The other men only exceeded their orders on their own responsibility. Oh, you would wear out any poor man's patience."

## Under the Stanley Pines

Folks in my position don't do such childish things as hire people to upset waggons loaded with machinery."

"I do not believe you," said Millicent, and Leslie laughed ironically.

"I don't know that it greatly matters whether you do or not. Have you any more dutiful things to say?"

"Just this. One hears of honour among thieves, and it is evident you cannot rise even to that. You have once more tricked me, and henceforward I warn you that you must carry on your work in your own way. Further, if I hear of any more plotting to do Thurstan injury, I shall at once inform him."

"Then," and Leslie gripped her arm until his fingers left their mark on the soft white flesh, "I warn you that it will be so much the worse for you. Good heavens, why don't you—but go, and don't tempt me to say what I feel greatly tempted to."

Millicent shook off his grasp, moved leisurely away, then turned and flung back a bitter answer from the half-opened door.

"Confound her!" said Leslie, refilling the glass upon the table. "Now, what the devil tempted me to ruin all my prospects by marrying that woman?"



## CHAPTER XX

### REPARATION

"YOU will have to go," said Henry Leslie, glancing sharply at his wife across the breakfast-table as he returned her an open letter which had lately arrived by the English mail. "I hardly know where to find the money for your passage out and home just now, and you will want new dresses—women always seem to do. Still, we can't afford to miss an opportunity, and it may prove a good investment," he added, reflectively.

Millicent sighed as she took the letter, and, ignoring her husband's words, read it through again. It had been written by a relative of her own who followed the legal profession, and requested her to return at once to England. The stern old man who had brought her up was slowly dying, and had expressed an urgent wish to see her.

"Isn't that the man who wanted you to marry Thurstan, and when you disappointed him washed his hands of both of you? There were reasons why I hadn't the pleasure of duly making the acquaintance of your relatives, but I think you said he was tolerably wealthy, and, as he evidently desires a reconciliation, you must do your best to please him," continued Leslie. "Let me see. You might catch the next New York Cunarder or the Allan boat from Quebec."

Millicent looked up at him angrily. She was not wholly heartless, and her kinsman had not only provided for her since her parents died in financial difficulties, but had been, in his own austere fashion,

## Reparation

kind to her. Accordingly, her husband's comments jarred upon her.

"I should certainly go, even if I had to travel by Colonist car and steerage," she said. "I should also do so if there were no hope of financial benefit, which is, after all, very uncertain, for Anthony Thurstan is not the man to change his mind when he has once come to a determination. The fact that he is dying and asks for me is sufficient—though it is perhaps useless to expect you to believe it."

"We must all die some day," was the abstracted answer. "Hardly an original observation, is it? But it would be folly to let such a chance pass, and I must try to spare you. If you really feel it, I sympathise with you, and had no intention of wounding your sensibilities, but as, unfortunately, circumstances force us to consider these questions practically, you will—well, you will do your best with the old man, Millicent. To put it so, you owe a duty to me."

Leslie and his wife had by this time learned to see each other's real self, as it were, naked and stripped of all disguise, and the sight was not calculated to inspire either with superfluous delicacy. The man, however, overlooked the fact that his partner in life still clung to a last grace of sentiment, and could, on occasion, deceive herself.

"I owe you a duty! How have you discharged yours to me?" she said. "Do not force me to oppose you, Harry, but if you are wise, go round to the depot and find when the steamers sail."

"Yes, my dear," said Leslie, with a smile he did not mean to be wholly ironical. "Would it be any use me saying that I shall miss you?"

"No," said Millicent, drily, though she returned his smile. "You really would not expect me to believe you. Still, if only because of the rareness of such civility, I rather like to hear you say so."

Mrs Leslie caught the first Cunarder, and duly arrived at a little station in the North of England



## His Master Purpose

where a dogcart was waiting to drive her to Crosbie Ghyll. She had known the man who drove it long ago, and he told her, with full details, how Anthony Thurstan, having come down from an iron-working town to visit the owner of the dilapidated edifice who was there shooting, had been wounded by a gun accident. The wound was not of itself serious, but the old man's health was failing, and he had not vitality sufficient to recover from the shock. There was no railway within some distance, and the surgeon had forbidden his removal.

Meantime, while Mrs Leslie was driven across the bleak brown moorlands, Anthony Thurstan lay with hollow face and nervous hands folded on the coverlet in the great bare guest-chamber at Crosbie Ghyll. He had been a hard, determined man, a younger son who had made money in business, while his brothers died poor, clinging to the land, and it was with characteristic grimness he lay quietly awaiting his end. The narrow, deep-sunk window in front of him was open wide, though the evening breeze blew chilly from the fells which rose blackly against an orange glow, and though he manifested no impatience, the sunset light beating in showed an expectant look in his eyes. A much younger man sat at a table close by and laid down the pen he held, when the other said,—

"That will do in the meantime, Halliday. Is there any sign of the dogcart yet? You are sure she will come to-night?"

"There is a vehicle of some kind behind the larches, but I cannot see it clearly," was the answer. "You can, however, rest satisfied, sir, for if Mrs Leslie has missed the train, she will arrive by the first to-morrow."

"To-morrow may be over late," said the old man. "I do not feel well to-night. Yes, she will come. Millicent is like her father, and though he ruined himself, it was not because he hadn't a keen eye for the main chance. And yet, perhaps, because I was

## Reparation

a lonely man and in my struggling days her mother was kind to me, I was fond of her. You needn't be jealous, Halliday. You will have the winding up of my estate, and it won't affect your share."

There was a vein of misanthropic irony in most of what Anthony Thurstan said, but the other had the same blood in him, and answered quickly,—

"My own business is flourishing, and I have tried to serve you hitherto because of the relationship. I have no other reason, sir."

"No," said Thurstan, with something approaching a hollow laugh. "There is no doubt you are genuine. Millicent took after her father and, in spite of it, I was fond of her. Tell me again. Did you consider her happy when you saw her in Canada?"

"As I said before, it is a delicate question, but I did not think so. Her husband struck me as a particularly poor sample, sir."

"Ah! She married the rascal suddenly out of pique, perhaps, when Geoffrey left her. I could never quite get at the truth of that story, which, of course, was framed otherwise in the conventional way, but even now, though he's nearer of kin than Millicent, I can't quite forgive Geoffrey. You saw him, you mentioned, on your last visit to those mines."

The speaker's tone was indifferent, but his eyes belied it, and Halliday answered,—

"If ever the whole truth came out I don't think you would blame Geoffrey, sir. Individually, I would take his word against—well, against any woman's solemn declaration. Yes, I saw him. He was making a pretty fight single-handed against somewhat overwhelming natural difficulties."

"Why?" asked Anthony Thurstan. "A woman out there, eh? Are you pleading his cause, Halliday? Remember, if you convince me, he may be another participant in the property."

"He did not explain all his motives to me, and nobody ever gained much by attempting to force a

## His Master Purpose

Thurstan's confidence. If you were not my kinsman and were in better health I should feel tempted to recommend you to place your affairs in other hands. Confound the property!"

There was a curious cackle in the sick man's throat, and the flicker of a smile in his sunken eyes.

"I can believe it. You are tarred with the same brush as Geoffrey. The obstinate fool must go out there with a couple of hundred pounds or so, when he knew he had only to humour me by marrying Millicent and wait for prosperity. And yet, in one way I'm glad he did. Never wrote me to apologise or explain—still, that's hardly surprising either. I don't know that any of us ever troubled much about other folks' opinions or listened to advice. Here am I, who might have lived another ten years, dying, because, when an officious keeper warned me, I went the opposite way. I hear wheels, Halliday."

"It is the dogcart," said Halliday. "Yes—I see Mrs Leslie."

"Thank God," said the sick man. "Bring her here as soon as she's ready. Meantime, send in the doctor. I feel worse to-night."

The light was dying fast when Millicent Leslie came softly into the great bare room, and, for Anthony Thurstan had paid for overtaxing his waning strength, her heart smote her as she looked upon him. She could recognise the stamp of fast approaching death. There was, nevertheless, an unusual gentleness in his eyes, which brightened at her approach, and with the exception of Geoffrey, whose sympathy filled her with shame, it was long since anyone had looked upon her with genuine kindness. So it was with genuine sorrow she knelt beside the bed and kissed him.

"I was shocked to hear of your accident, but it was some time ago, and you are recovering," she said, trying to speak hopefully, but with a catch in her breath.

"I am dying," was the answer, and Millicent

## Reparation

sobbed when the withered fingers rested on her hair.

"I wanted to see you before I went. I was fond of you, Milly, and you—you and Geoffrey angered me. It was not your fault," the somewhat strained voice added wistfully. "He—I don't wish to hurt you, or hear the stereotyped version he of course endorsed. He left you?"

Millicent Leslie was not wholly evil. She had a soft side, and dreaded to inflict further pain upon one she owed much to in the moment of reconciliation, while, if the truth was not in her, there was at least this in her favour, so at least she afterwards tried to convince herself, that, prompted by a desire to smooth a dying man's last hours, she voluntarily accepted a very unpleasant part. Still, she was thankful her head was bent as she said, "It was perhaps my fault. I would not—I could not consent to humour him in what appeared a senseless project—and so Geoffrey went to Canada."

She felt the old man's hand move caressingly across her hair. "Poor Millicent," he said. "And you chose another husband. Are you happy with him out there? But stay, it is twilight and the old place is gloomy. If you would like them, ask for candles. Geoffrey—Geoffrey left you!"

Millicent did not desire candles, but gently drew herself away. Anthony Thurstan's tenderness had touched her, and with sudden compunction she remembered that she had deceived a dying man. He believed her, but she did not wish him to see her face. She drew a chair towards the bed, and for a moment looked about her, striving to collect her scattered thoughts. Framed by the stone-ribbed window, the afterglow still shimmered a pale luminous green, and one star twinkled over the black shoulder of Crosbie Fell. Curlew called mournfully down in the misty mosses, and when she turned her head the sick man's face showed faintly livid against the darker coverings of the bed. For a moment she felt

## His Master Purpose

tempted to make full confession, or at least excuses for Geoffrey, but Thurstan spoke again just then and the moment was lost.

"I asked are you happy in Canada, Millicent," he repeated, and there was command as well as kindness in his tone. Anthony Thurstan, mine owner and iron works director, was dying, but he had long been a ruler of stiff-necked men, and the habit of authority still remained with him. It struck Millicent that he was in many ways very like Geoffrey.

"I am not," she said. "I would not have told you if you had not insisted. It is the result of my own folly, and there is no use complaining."

Anthony Thurstan stretched out a thin, claw-like hand and laid it on one of her own. "Tell me," he said.

"We are poor. That is, my husband's position is precarious, and it is a constant struggle to live up to it."

"Then why do you try?" And Millicent sighed as she answered,—

"It is, I believe, necessary or he would lose it, while he aims at obtaining sufficient influence to win him a connection if he resumed his former land business."

"From what I know it is a rascally business; but there is more than this. My time is very short, Millicent, but it seems such a very little while since a bright-haired girl who atoned for another's injury sat upon my knee, and for the sake of those days I can still protect you. Your husband treats you ill?"

There was a vibration in the strained voice which more strongly reminded the listener of Geoffrey's, and awoke her bitterness against the man she had married. It was also so long since she had taken a living soul into her confidence, and she answered impulsively, "There is no use hiding the truth from you. He does not treat me well."

Then she related the story of her married life, and Anthony Thurstan listened gravely, comprehending more than she meant to tell him, for when she had



## Reparation

finished he said, "You have neither been over loyal nor over wise—too quick to see the present gain, blind to the greater behind—but it is my part to help, not blame you, and I will try to do so. It is dark now. Please ask for my draught and the candles. Then I want you to tell me about Geoffrey. You have met him in Canada."

Millicent, retiring, stood for a few minutes looking down from a narrow window in the bare stone corridor on to the moor. There was no moon, but the night was luminous, for the stars twinkled with a windy glitter that was flung back by a neighbouring tarn. The call of the curlew seemed more mournful, the crying of lapwing rose from the meadow land, and she started at a hollow hoot as an owl swept by on muffled wing. The night voices filled her with an eerie sensation—there was, she recollected, always something creepy about Crosbie Ghyll, and, for Millicent was superstitious, she shivered again at the reflection that she had cheated a dying man. But she could make partial reparation to the living at least, and when she came back with the candles there was resolve in her face.

"You asked me about Geoffrey. He has no reason to be ashamed of his record in Canada," she said. "I will tell you what I know from the beginning—and I hope I shall tell it well."

It was a relief to do so, and the story of Geoffrey's struggle and prospective triumph was a stirring one as it fell from the lips of the woman who had thrice wronged him. She guessed how her husband's employers had plotted, having gathered much from the talk of his guests, and the old man listened eagerly, until he struck the coverlet when she concluded. Grim satisfaction was stamped upon his twitching face.

"It is a brave story. I thank you, Millicent; you told it very well. Ay, the old blood tells—and I was proud of the lad. Went his own way in spite of me—he is my kinsman, what should I expect of him?"



## His Master Purpose

Standing alone for a broken master, with cunning and wealth against him and his last dollar in the scheme! Quite in keeping with traditions, and there'll be broken crowns before they beat him down."

The dying man, who had fought perhaps as hardly all his life long, gasped once or twice before he added, "You must go now, Millicent. Send Halliday to me."

Millicent went out with a throbbing pulse and downcast eyes, and when the lawyer came in Thurstan said, "Read over that partly completed will."

"Had you not better rest until to-morrow, sir?" was the answer. "Dr Maltby warned you—"

"You ought to know by this time that I seldom took a warning, and to-morrow may be too late. Write, and write quickly. After payment of all bequests above, balance of real estate to yourself and Forsyth as trustees, to apply and use for the individual benefit of Millicent Leslie. If her husband lays hands upon it, I'll haunt you. You have power to nominate Geoffrey Thurstan as your co-trustee. God knows what may happen, and her rascally husband may get himself shot by somebody he has swindled some day. What I wished for mightn't follow then? I'm paying you to make my will and not dictate to me. Repeat it as many times as may appear necessary to let my meaning show clearly through your legal phraseology."

"I have got it down, sir," said the writer, presently.

"Now, after deductions enumerated, all my floating investments in mines, stocks and shares to Geoffrey Thurstan, to hold or sell as pleases him, unconditionally. Bequeathed in the hope that this will help him to confound his enemies."

It was written, signed and witnessed by Musker and the surgeon, then Anthony Thurstan asked once more and very faintly for Millicent. He drew her down beside him and took her hand in his thin, gnarled one before he said,—



## Reparation

“ I have done my best for you, Milly—and again thank you for the story. After what Halliday said, it has helped to conquer an old bitterness, and—for my work is finished—I can die contented. I may be gone to-morrow, and my strength is spent. Good-bye, Milly. God bless you !”

Millicent stooped and kissed him with a sense of shame, but was afterwards glad she did it, for before morning all power of speech or volition left Anthony Thurstan, and twelve hours later he was dead.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A REPRIEVE

IT was with a heavy heart that Geoffrey Thurstan turned over the papers Thomas Savine spread out before him in the Vancouver offices.

"I'm most scared to do any more figuring," said the latter. "Money is going to be uncommonly tight with us, and, to make things worse, I can neither realise nor borrow. My brother's investments are way below par now, and the first sign of any weakness would raise up an opposition that would finish us. I can't stay here for ever, and poor Julius is steadily getting worse instead of better. Are you still certain you can get the work done before the winter's through?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "If I can get the machines and sufficient men—which means money. There's a moderate fortune waiting us once we can run the water out of the valley, and it's worth a desperate effort to secure it."

"We have made a good many since my brother gave me his power of attorney, and I have sunk more of my own money than my partners, who have backed me pluckily, care about. Still, I can't see how I'm going to meet your estimate, nohow."

"You have just got to do it," said Geoffrey. "It is the part you chose. At my end, I'll stop for nothing short of manslaughter. We simply can't afford to be beaten, and we're not going to be."

"I hope not," and Thomas Savine sighed dubiously. "Your assurance is refreshing, Geoffrey, but



## A Reprieve

I own up I can't see—well, we've done enough for one day. Come round and spend the evening with me. Mrs Savine is anxious to see you."

Geoffrey hesitated for a few seconds, and Thomas Savine smiled at something which faintly amused him. Remembering Helen's freezing look and his occupation when she last saw him, the former felt that it might not be pleasant to meet her so soon. Then, because he was a proud man, he endeavoured to accept the invitation with cordiality.

"I am glad you will come," said Thomas Savine, with a trace of the dry humour which occasionally characterised him.

Geoffrey, who felt that in this instance the pleasure was hardly mutual, and that Helen might not share it with her uncle, said nothing further on that subject, until Mrs Savine met him in the hotel corridor. A friendship had grown up between them ever since the day Geoffrey endured the elixir after mending the bicycle, and there was mischievous amusement in the lady's eyes as she said, "My compliments, Geoffrey. You are a brave man."

"I don't deserve them, madam. Wherein lies the bravery? Being at present in perfect health, I have no cause to fear you."

Mrs Savine laughed good-naturedly, then laid her hand upon his arm with a friendly gesture. "Sober earnest, I am glad you came. I believe in you, Geoffrey, and like to see a man show the grit that's in him."

"I am honoured," said Geoffrey, with a little bow, and a grateful look in his brown eyes, which did not quail in the slightest under the lady's scrutiny.

In spite of her goodwill, he, however, derived little pleasure from that evening of relaxation. Helen showed no open displeasure, but he was painfully conscious that what she had seen had been a shock to her. It was impossible for him to volunteer an explanation, and that one should be demanded equally so. He was accordingly glad to adjourn

## His Master Purpose

with Savine and a cigar-box to the verandah, and took his leave early, trying to console himself with the reflection that he had at least shown no weakness. Helen was not present when he bade Mrs Savine farewell, but she saw him stride away over the gravel, beneath the blue-white glare of the electric lights nevertheless, and though she would not ask herself why, felt gratified that he had not stayed away.

It was some time later when he sat one day of early winter in his wooden shanty, which at that season replaced the tent above the cañon. English Jim was busy writing close by, and Geoffrey, gnawing an unlighted pipe, glanced alternately through the open door at his hurrying workmen and at the letter from Thomas Savine in his hand. It expressed a fear that a financial crisis was imminent.

"Tell him he must settle all local bills up to the minute," said Thurstan, throwing it across to his amanuensis. "I daresay the English makers will wait a little for payment due on machinery. Did you find that the sum I mentioned would cover the wages through the winter?"

"Only just," was the answer. "That is, unless you could cut some of them a little."

"Not a cent," said Geoffrey. "The poor devils who risk their lives daily fully earn them."

"Do you know they equal the figure the strikers demanded and you refused to pay? Summers told me about that dispute, sir," ventured English Jim, and Geoffrey smiled drily.

"The strikers were not prepared to earn them—and that one word, demanded, makes a big difference. Hallo! who is the stranger?"

Mattawa Tom was directing a horseman towards the shanty, and Geoffrey, who watched him with growing interest, found something familiar in his face and figure, until he rose up in astonishment when the stranger rode nearer.

"Halliday, by all that's wonderful!" he said. "Un-



## A Reprieve

commonly glad to see you ; but whatever brought you back to this far-off land again ? ”

“ Several things,” was the answer, as the newcomer, shaking the snow from his furs, dismounted stiffly. “ Strain of overwork necessitated a change, my doctor told me. Trust estate I’m winding up comprised doubtful British Columbian mining interests, and last, but not least, to see you, Geoffrey.”

The man’s fur coat was open now, and Geoffrey, who glanced at the black one beneath it, said, “ I’m glad of the latter anyway, but come in. Here, Jake, take the horse to the stable. Are my sympathies needed, Halliday—any of my few friends over yonder dead ? ”

Halliday stared at him blankly. “ Haven’t you read the letter I sent you ? Do you get no English papers ? ”

“ No, to both. I fancy very few people over yonder trouble themselves as to whether I’m living, much less to send me papers. How did you address your letter ? ”

“ Orchard City, or was it Orchardville ? Mrs Leslie told me the name, and I looked it up on a map,” and Geoffrey thrust his guest into a chair.

“ That explains it. This is Orchard Valley ; other place is away across the province, a forlorn hamlet, and some ox-driving postmaster has no doubt returned your letter. Do you bring bad news ? Don’t keep me in suspense.”

“ Anthony Thurstan’s dead. Died in your old place, partly the result of a gun accident,” said Halliday, and Geoffrey sat silent for a space.

“ I’m sorry—yes, sincerely,” he said at last. “ I can say it freely, because, as I daresay you know, I disappointed him, and can in no way benefit. In fact, he had the power to refuse me what was morally my right, and no doubt exercised it. Still, now it’s too late, I feel ashamed I never tried to patch up the quarrel. Poor old Anthony ! ”

Halliday smiled drily. “ You are a better fellow



## His Master Purpose

than you often lead folks to suppose, Geoffrey—and I quite believe you. Such regrets are, however, generally useless, are they not? In this case especially so, for Anthony Thurstan forgot the quarrel before he died, and sent you his very good wishes. I see I have a surprise in store. You are a beneficiary. He has bequeathed you considerably more than your moral share in the property."

Thurstan strode up and down the shanty before he halted, saying, "I'm glad that, though perhaps I deserved it, he didn't carry the bitterness into the grave with him. We were too like each other to get on well, but there was a time when he was a good friend to me. It's no use pretending I'm not also pleased at what you tell me—it means a great deal to me. But you must be tired and hungry, and I want to talk by the hour to you."

Halliday did full justice to the meal the camp cook produced, and afterwards the pair sat talking until the short winter afternoon had drawn to a close and the first stars were blinking down on untrodden snows. Then answering a question Halliday said,—

"Your share—I'll show you complete list when I unpack my things—will, if left invested, provide you with a moderate income for a single man. Indeed, with your Spartan tastes, you might live in what you would consider luxury. As usual, however, in such cases, the securities are not readily marketable, and your interest in some ventures could hardly be summarily realised at any sacrifice. The whole is left to you unconditionally, but my advice is decidedly hold on."

"I am sorry," said Geoffrey, "because even at a sacrifice I intend to sell. If you're not too tired to listen a little longer, I'll try to explain why."

Halliday listened gravely. Then he said, "As Anthony Thurstan said, it is characteristic of you, and it's possible he would have approved of what on the surface looks like folly. He stated he hoped the



## A Reprieve

bequest would help you to confound your enemies. But you must consider it as a business man. You say if you go no deeper your firm might still wind just up solvent; then why not abandon the apparently hopeless project, and withdraw—follow your profession if you must work, or live upon your income. This drainage scheme looks tolerably desperate on your own showing, and if selling at a sacrifice you sink all your new possessions in it, you may be left utterly cleaned out, a beggar. You have no further relatives likely to leave you another competence, Geoffrey.”

“It can’t be helped—or rather I don’t want to help it. I’ve pledged my word and honour to see this undertaking through, and I mean to redeem it if it ruins me. Now what were you telling me about Mrs Leslie?”

Halliday explained for some minutes before he said, “You are on the spot, and it’s your duty to join us. Anthony Thurstan was always eccentric, and has left us a very troublesome charge. Her husband is not to get at the money, and this discrimination between man and wife is going to be confoundedly awkward. However, as I’m going to stay some little time, and if possible shoot a mountain sheep, we can discuss it at leisure.”

Thomas Savine, who came up in a day or two, speedily became good friends with Halliday. Geoffrey had his work to attend to, and was suspicious that Halliday seized the opportunity his absence afforded to explain the sacrifice he proposed to make to Savine. Neither was he deceived—for one evening when the Englishman was down in the cañon watching the workmen toiling in the river, under the lurid blaze of the lucigen, the former said,—

‘I’m going to talk straight, Geoffrey. Your friend told me the whole thing, and I agree with his opinion. See here, you are safe for life if you hold fast on to what you have got now—and the Lord knows whether we will ever be successful in the



## His Master Purpose

cañon. Of course the money would help us, but it isn't sufficient to make victory dead certain, and would be a drop in the bucket if we came down with a bang, as we may very well do. Even considering what's at stake, I couldn't let you make the plunge without protesting."

"If I had ten times as much, or ten times as little, it would all go after the rest," said Geoffrey. "I appreciate your good intentions, but you can't, and never will, convince me, so there's no use talking. You will, in the meantime, say no word to Miss Savine on the subject."

Next morning Geoffrey said to his guest, "I want you to write out a telegram to your partner in England. Yonder's a mounted messenger waiting for it. He's to sell everything bequeathed me at the best price he can. You have done your best, Halliday, and I suppose I ought to be more grateful than I am, but you see I'm rather fond than otherwise of a big risk. We'll ride over with Mr Savine and call upon my partner to-day."

It was late in the afternoon when the two arrived at the ranch Savine had rented. It was the nearest dwelling to the camp that could be rendered comfortable, but lay some distance from it, over a very bad trail. Helen was not cordial towards Geoffrey, and the latter, leaving her to entertain Halliday, slipped away to the room looking down the valley, where his partner sat with a fur robe wrapped about his bent shoulders. His face had grown very hollow and his eyes were curiously dim.

"It was good of you to come, Geoffrey," he said. "How are you getting on in the cañon?"

"Famously, sir. We are certainly going to beat the river," was the prompt answer, and remembering the accession of capital, Geoffrey's cheerfulness was real. "I'm hoping to ask Miss Savine to fire the final shot some time before the snows melt."

Savine looked at him with a trace of his old keenness, and appeared satisfied that the speaker believed



## A Reprieve

in his own prediction, then he smiled as he said, "You do me good, Geoffrey. Good news is better than gallons of medicine, and when you make such a promise I feel I can trust you. I'm grateful, but it's mighty trying to lie here helpless while another man plays out my last and boldest game for me. Lord! what wouldn't I give for just three months of my old vigour! Still, I'll never be fit again, and as I must lean on somebody, I'm glad it should be you."

"Lean on me! You have given me the chance of my life, sir. You don't look quite comfortable there. Let me settle that rug for you," said Geoffrey, and as with clumsy gentleness he re-arranged the sick man's wrappings, Helen came unobserved into the room. She read the pity beneath the smile on the younger man's bronze face, noticed how willingly his hard fingers did their unaccustomed work, and her heart grew soft towards him as she heard her father's sigh of content. The sight touched, though, for a reason she was ashamed of, it also troubled her. Unwilling to disturb them, she merely smiled when Geoffrey saw her, and found herself a seat in a corner.

"My brain's not so clear as it used to be. No use hiding things. Why," commenced Savine, and Geoffrey, who surmised he had not seen his daughter, knocked over a medicine bottle with his elbow and spent some time noisily groping under the table for it. The action might have deceived one of his own sex, but Helen, who wondered what his motive was, grew piqued as well as curious.

"I've been worrying over things lately," continued Savine. "There was one of the rancher's hired men in and he told our folks a mixed story about a sluice gate bursting. You never mentioned it to me. Now I have a hazy notion that I made a drawing for a gate one day, when I was—sick, we'll say. I looked for it afterwards and couldn't find it. I've been thinking over it considerable lately."

"Then you are very foolish, sir," said Geoffrey. "Of course, we have had one or two minor breakages, but

## His Master Purpose

nothing we were unable to remedy. Just now everything is going ahead in the most satisfactory manner."

Helen, who watched the speaker, decided he was concealing something, and also fancied her father did not seem quite satisfied.

"I've been wondering whether it was that gate which burst. See here, Geoffrey, I feel you have had bad trouble; isn't it a little mean not to tell me? You will remember I'm still Julius Savine—and only a little while ago there was no man in the province dare try to fool me."

A measure of the speaker's former spirit revealed itself in a clearer vibration of his voice, and, raising himself on one elbow from the lounge in which he lay, Savine became for a moment almost the man he had been. By some trick of fancy his action and words suggested to his daughter the speech of Arthur passing to Sir Bedevere, but it was not until afterwards she learned, to the credit of modern chivalry, how hard a task the blunt Thurstan had laid upon himself. He had determined in his simple fashion to hold his fallen leader's credit safe, not only before the eyes of others but even in his own, and was doing it to the best of his ability.

"Of course, we have had trouble—lots of it, but nothing we could not overcome," he repeated. "If everything went smoothly it would grow monotonous. Still, you can rest perfectly contented, sir, and assist us with your judgment in the difficult cases. For instance, would you let me know what you think of these specifications?"

Savine, who seemed to find a childish pleasure in being consulted, forgot his former anxiety, and Geoffrey, who left him contented, slipped out of the ranch, and finding a sheltered path among the red-woods paced to and fro. He was presently surprised to see Helen move out from among the trunks with a fur about her shoulders which set off the finely-chiselled face above it and the shapely in-



## A Reprieve

curving beneath its tasselled hem. Nevertheless, for once at least, he was by no means pleased to see her.

"I wish to ask you a question," she said. "Of course, though we prevented my father doing so, I have heard there was an inquiry into the breaking of the sluice, but neither you nor my uncle thought fit to give me any definite information on the subject. Unfortunately, my father heard distorted rumours of the accident and has been fretting ever since. As you know, this is most detrimental to his failing health, and so that I may be the better able to soothe him I want you to tell me all that happened."

"There is absolutely no cause for uneasiness. As I said, we had one or two difficulties which have been vanquished. Your uncle will bear me out in this," said Geoffrey, who would have spoken more freely had he not feared the fair questioner's keenness, and Helen's face, which was at first scornful, grew anxious as she answered him,—

"I have no doubt he would! In fact, when I asked him he did so with such readiness that I cannot help concluding you have both conspired to keep me in the dark. Can you not see that, situated as I am, with an invalid who will not let his mind rest to care for, uncertainty is almost worse than disaster to me. Will you not tell me what you fear, frankly?"

"I would do anything to drive your fears away," and Geoffrey, who felt helpless beneath the listener's searching eyes, spoke pitifully. "But I can only say again there is very slight cause for anxiety."

Helen turned half from him angrily, then faced round again. "You are not a good dissembler, if quick at making statements you are not prepared to substantiate," she said. "You would do anything to dispel my fears—but the one most necessary thing I ask. You have passed through, or are now facing, a crisis, and though some knowledge of it would be of

## His Master Purpose

great help to me you do not consider me worthy of your confidence."

"Heaven forbid that I should think so. There is no one more worthy—but—" and Helen checked him with a gesture.

"I desire the simple truth and not indifferent compliments," she said. "You will not tell it me, and I will plead with you no further, even for my father's sake. When will you men learn that a woman's discretion is at least equal to your own?" Then, with a flash in her eyes, she added, "How dare you once offer what you did to a woman you had no trust in?"

"You are almost cruel," said Geoffrey, clenching his hand as he mastered his own anger. "Perhaps you will yet believe I tried to do what was best some day. Meantime, since I dare not presume to resent it, I must try to bear your displeasure patiently."

He might have said more, but that Helen turned and left him abruptly.

"It is confoundedly hard. Once strike a certain vein of bad luck and you can neither get round nor under it, but there's no use groaning—and what on earth could I have done?" he said to the whispering firs.

He went back presently to the ranch, and found Helen, who did not apparently notice his return, chatting with Halliday, while, when the two bade their host farewell, Halliday, who lingered a few minutes, observed to Thomas Savine,—

"I always knew my friend was reckless, but when I spoke as I did I failed to comprehend what was at once his incentive and justification. I must thank you for your attempt to aid me, but even against the dictates of my judgment I can't help sympathising with him now. If you don't mind me saying so—because I see you know—I think what he hopes to win is well worth the risk."

"I certainly know, and perhaps I am prejudiced in favour of my niece, but I feel tempted to agree with



## A Reprieve

you," answered Savine. "There are few better women in the Dominion, but she is wayward, and whether Geoffrey will ever win her only Heaven knows. Meantime, though we depend so much upon him, I am often ashamed to let him take his chances with us. Believe me, I have endeavoured to dissuade him."

Halliday smiled. "I am a kinsman of his and know him well. It is quite in keeping with traditions that he should be perfectly willing to ruin himself for a woman, and I am at least thankful that the woman proves worthy. In this case, however, I venture to hope the end may be the achievement of prosperity. I generally speak my mind and hope I have not offended you."

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE ULTIMATUM

WINTER creeping down from the high peaks held the whole valley fast in its icy grip when Mrs Thomas Savine, who was seldom daunted by the elements, came up from Vancouver to persuade her niece to seek sheltered quarters until spring on the sunny coast. Her visit was, however, in this respect a failure, for Julius Savine insisted upon remaining within touch of the reclamation works. Though seldom able to reach them, he looked eagerly forward to Geoffrey's brief visits, which alone seemed to rouse him from his lethargy, while the latter told nobody what the effort to conceal his own anxiety and appear always hopeful cost.

Mrs Savine and Helen sat in the general living-room of the ranch one day when her brother-in-law came in leaning heavily upon his partner's arm. Geoffrey had set his carpenters to build a sleigh, and from one hill shoulder bare of timber it was possible to see what went on in the cañon with good glasses. Savine was listening with evident satisfaction to the tall, frost-bronzed man who led him towards the room he delighted to call his office, and Mrs Savine, noticing it, smiled gratefully upon Geoffrey. Worn by anxious watching, Helen, however, was possibly a little out of humour that afternoon, and the sight awoke within her a certain jealousy. She had done her best, and done it very patiently, but she had failed to arouse her father to the animation he showed in Geoffrey's presence.

"I haven't felt so well since I saw you last," said



## The Ultimatum

Savine, oblivious for the moment of his daughter. "You won't fail to come back as soon as ever you can—say the day after to-morrow?"

Geoffrey glanced round towards Helen, who made no sign, and Mrs Savine noticed that for a moment his face grew clouded. Then, as he turned towards his partner, he seemed to make an effort, and it was confident again.

"I am afraid I cannot leave the works quite so often. Yes—we are progressing at least as well as anyone could expect," he said. "I will come and consult you whenever I can. In fact, there are several points I want your advice upon."

"Come soon," said Savine, with a sigh. "It does me good to talk to you—after the life I've lived this everlasting loafing comes mighty hard to me. I believe once I knew we were victorious I could let go everything and die happy."

Helen heard, and, overwrought as she was by nights of assiduous care, the speech both pained and in her present humour angered her. Geoffrey's answer was not audible, for the pair passed on. He came back alone, off his guard for a moment, looking worn and weary, and Mrs Savine said,—

"You are tired, Geoffrey, and if you don't appear more lively next time I will attend to you. No—don't get scared. It is not physic I'm going to prescribe now. Take this lounge and just sit here where it's cosy talking to Helen and me until supper's ready."

Thurstan had been crawling over ice-crusts on rocks and wading knee-deep in water most of the preceding night. The chair in question stood temptingly between the two ladies in a red curtained corner near the stove, and he glanced towards it and Helen longingly. Some impulse tempted the girl to say, "Mr Thurstan has usually so little time to spare that it would be almost too much to hope that he could devote an hour to us."

The tone was ironical, and Geoffrey, who, excusing himself, went out, sighed as he floundered down the



## His Master Purpose

snow-cumbered trail, while there was indignation in the elder lady's voice as she said,—

"I am ashamed of you, Helen. The poor man came in too late for dinner, and he must be starving. If you had just seen how he looked at you! You'd feel mean and sorry if they found him to-morrow frozen hard in the snow."

Helen could not fancy Geoffrey overcome by such a journey because he had missed two meals, and she smiled at her aunt's dismal picture, answering her with a flippancy which increased the elder lady's indignation, "Mr Thurstan is not a cannibal, auntie."

"I can't figure why you are fooling with that man if you don't want him," said Mrs Savine. "Oh, yes; you're going to sit here and listen to some straight talking. Isn't he good enough for you?"

Helen's face was flushed with angry colour. "You speak unpleasantly frankly, but I will endeavour to answer you," she said. "I have told Mr Thurstan—that is, I have tried to warn him he was expecting the impossible, and what more could I do? He is my father's partner, and I cannot refuse to see him. I—"

Mrs Savine, leaning forward, took her niece's hands in her own, saying gravely, "Are you certain it is quite impossible?"

For a moment Helen looked startled, and her eyes fell. Then, raising her head, she answered, "Have I not told you so? I have been anxious about my father lately and do not feel myself to-day. Surely you have no wish to further torment me."

"No, but I mean to finish what I have to say. Do you know all that man is doing for you? He has—" but Mrs Savine ceased abruptly, remembering she had in return for her husband's confidence promised secrecy.

"Yes. I think I know everything," said Helen, with something suspiciously like a sob, while her aunt broke her pledge to the extent of shaking her head with a gesture of negation. "It—it makes it worse for me. I dare not bid him go away, and I grow



## The Ultimatum

horribly ashamed because—because it hurts one to be conscious of so heavy a debt. Besides, he is consoling himself with Mrs Leslie!”

“Geoffrey Thurstan would be the last man to consider you owed him anything, and as to Mrs Leslie—pshaw! It’s as sure as death, Geoffrey don’t care two bits for her. He would never let you feel that debt, my dear, but the debt is there. From what Tom has told me he has said no to offer after offer, and you know that if he carries this last scheme through the credit and most of the dollars will fall to your father.”

“I know,” and the moisture gathered in Helen’s eyes. “I am grateful, very grateful—as I said, ashamed, too; but my father comes first. I tried to warn him, but he would not take no. I feel frightened almost sometimes that he will force me to yield against my will, but that would be a wrong to him—and what can I do?”

Helen, unclasping her hands from her aunt’s, looked straight before her, and the elder lady answered gently, “Not that. No—if you can’t like him it would not be fair to him. Only try to be kind, and make quite sure it is impossible. It might have been better for poor Geoffrey if he had never mixed himself up with us. You, with all your good points, are mighty proud, my dear, but I have seen proud women find out their mistake when it was too late to set things straight. Wait, and without the help of a meddlesome old woman it will perhaps all come right some day.”

“Auntie,” said Helen, looking down some minutes later. “Though you meant it in kindness, I am almost vexed with you. I have never spoken of these things to anyone before, and though it has comforted me, you won’t remind me—will you?”

“No,” and the elder lady smiled upon her. “Of course not! But you are pale and worried, and I figure there is nothing would fix you better than a few drops of the elixir. I think I sent you a new bottle.”

## His Master Purpose

Then, though her eyes were misty, Helen laughed outright. "It was very kind of you, but I fear I lost the bottle, and have wasted too much time over my troubles. What can I tempt my father with for supper?"

When Geoffrey returned to camp, Halliday, who had arrived that day from Vancouver, had much to tell him.

"I've sold your English property, and the value lies to your credit in the B. O. M. agency. All you have to do is to draw upon them," he said. "As you intend to sink it in these works I can only wish you the best of good luck. Now, I'm starting for home to-morrow, and there's the other question—how to protect the interests of Mrs Leslie. Anthony Thurstan made a just will, and her share, while enough to maintain her, is not a large one, but I don't see yet just how it's to be handled. It was the testator's special wish that you should join the trustees, and that her husband should not lay his hands upon a dollar. From careful inquiries made in Vancouver, he's a distinctly bad lot. Anyway, you'll have to help us in the meantime, Geoffrey, and in opening a small bank account I made your signature necessary on every cheque."

"It's a confoundedly unpleasant position under the circumstances. What on earth could my kinsman have been thinking of when he forced it upon me of all men," said Geoffrey, with a rueful face. "Still, I owe him a good deal, and suppose that in the meantime only I must agree."

"I cannot take upon myself to determine what the testator thought," was the dry answer. "He said the estimable Mr Leslie might either shoot or drink himself to death some day. The late Anthony Thurstan was a tenacious person, and you must draw your own conclusions."

"If there was one thing which more than another tempted me to refuse you every scrap of assistance, it was the conclusion I arrived at," said Geoffrey.



## The Ultimatum

"However, I'll try to keep faith with the dead man, and Heaven send me sense sufficient to steer clear of difficulties."

"I can trust your honesty any way," said Halliday. "There's a heavy load off my mind at last. You are a good fellow, Geoffrey, and, excuse the frankness, even in questions beyond your usual scope not so simple as you sometimes look."

A day or two before this conversation took place, Henry Leslie, sitting at his writing-table in the bijou villa above the inlet, laid down his pen and looked up gratefully at his wife, who placed a strip of stamped paper before him. Millicent both smiled and frowned as she noticed how greedily his fingers fastened upon it.

"It is really very good of you. You don't know how much this draft means to me," he said. "I wish I needn't take it, but I am forced to. It's practically the whole of the first dole your skinflint trustee made you, isn't it?"

"It is a large share," was the answer. "Almost a year's allowance, and I'm going to pay off our most pressing debts with the rest. But I am glad to give it you, Harry, and we must try to be better friends, and keep on the safe side after this."

"I hope we shall," said the man, who was touched for once, with a little laugh. "It's tolerably hard for folks like us who must go when the devil drives to be virtuous, but I got hold of a few mining shares which promise to pay well now almost for nothing, and if they turn up trumps I'd feel greatly tempted to throw over the Company and start afresh."

He hurriedly scribbled a little note, and Millicent turned away with a smile that was not far from a sigh. She had returned from England in a repentant mood, and her husband, whose affairs had gone smoothly, was almost considerate, so that, following a reconciliation, there were occasions when she cherished an uncertain hope that they might struggle back to their former level. It was on one of these



## His Master Purpose

she had promised to give him a draft to redeem the loan Director Shackleby held like a whip lash over him. Had Leslie been a bolder man, it is possible that his wife's aspirations might have been realised, for Millicent was not impervious to good influences.

Unfortunately for her, however, a freely-spoken gentleman called Shackleby, who said he had been sent by his colleagues managing the Industrial Enterprise Company, called upon Thurstan and Savine together in their city offices about that time. He came straight to the point after the fashion of Western business men.

"Julius Savine has rather too big a stake in the Orchard Valley for any one man," he said. "It's ancient history that if, as usual with such concerns as ours, we hadn't been a day or two too slow, we would have held the concessions instead of him. Neither need I tell you about the mineral indications both in the reefs and alluvial. Now we saw our way to rake a good many dollars out of that valley, but when Savine got in ahead we just sat tight and watched him, ready to act if he found the undertaking too big for him. It seems to me that has happened, which explains my visit to-day. We might be open to buy some of those conditional lands from you."

"They may never be ours to sell, though I hope for the contrary," said Geoffrey.

"Exactly," said the other. "That is why we're only open to offer you out-district virgin forest value for the portions coloured blue in this plan. In other words, we speculate by advancing you money on very uncertain security."

Geoffrey laughed after a glance at the plan. "You have a pretty taste! After giving you all the best for a tithe of its future value, where do we come in?"

"On the rest," said Shackleby, coolly. "We would pay down the dollars now, and advance you enough



## The Ultimatum

on interest to place you beyond all risks in completing operations. Though you might get more for the land, without this assistance, you might get nothing, and it will be a pretty heavy cheque. I suppose I needn't say it was not until lately we decided to meet you this way."

"By your leave!" broke in Thomas Savine, who had been scribbling figures on a scrap of paper which he passed to Geoffrey. It bore a few lines scrawled across the foot of it, "Value absurdly low, but it might be a good way to hedge against total loss, and we could level up the average on the rest. What do you think?"

Geoffrey grasped a pen, and the paper went back with the brief answer, "That it would be a wilful sacrifice of Miss Savine's future."

"Suppose we refused?" he asked, and Shackleby stroked his moustache meditatively before he made answer,—

"Don't you think that would be foolish? You see, we were not unanimous by a long way on this policy, and several of our leaders agree with me that we had better stick to our former one. It's a big scheme, and accidents will happen however careful one may be. Then there's the risk of new conditions being imposed upon you by the authorities. Besides, you have a time limit to finish in, and mightn't do it, especially without the assistance we could in several ways render you. You can't have a great many dollars left either—see?"

"I do," said Geoffrey, with an ominous glitter in his eyes. "You needn't speak more plainly. Accidents, no doubt of the kind you refer to, have happened already. They have not, however, stopped us yet, and are not going to, while I, of course, appreciate your delicate reference to your former policy. I conclude it was your policy individually. I don't like threats, even veiled ones, and nobody ever succeeded in coercing me. Accordingly, when we have drained it, we'll sell you all the land you want

## His Master Purpose

at its market value. You can't have an acre at anything like the price you offer now."

"That's your ultimatum. Yes? Then I'm only wasting time, and hope you won't be sorry," said Shackleby, and when he went out Geoffrey turned to Thomas Savine.

"A declared enemy is preferable to a treacherous ally," he said drily. "That man would never have kept faith with us."

"I don't know," was the answer. "Of course, he's crooked, but he has his qualities. Anyway, I'd sooner trust him than the invertebrate crawler, Leslie."

A day or two later Shackleby called upon Leslie in his offices and received the cheque Millicent had given the latter with evident surprise.

"I wasn't in any hurry. Have some of your titled relatives in the old country left you a fortune?" he inquired ironically.

"No," was the answer. "My folks are mostly distinctly poor commoners. I, well—I have been rather fortunate lately."

"Here's your receipt," said Shackleby, with an embarrassing stare, adding when Leslie, after examining it carefully, thrust the paper into the glowing stove, "Careful man! Nobody is going to get ahead of you, but can't you see that blame paper couldn't have made a cent's worth of difference between you and me. Well, if you still value your connection with the Company, I have something to tell you. That infernal idiot Thurstan won't hear of making terms, and, as you know, there's a fortune waiting if we can corral the valley."

"I can see the desirability, but not the means of accomplishing it," said Leslie.

"No!" and the speaker glanced at him scornfully. "Well, Thurstan must finish by next summer, or his conditional grants are subject to revision, while it's quite plain he can only work in the cañon in winter. Something in the accident line has got to happen."



## The Ultimatum

"It failed before," and Shackleby laughed.

"What's the matter with trying again, and keeping on trying? I've got influence enough to double your salary if Thurstan doesn't get through. It will be tolerably easy, for this time I don't count on trusting too much to you. I'll send you along a man and you'll just make a bet with him—we'll fix the odds presently and they'll be heavy against us—that Thurstan successfully completes the job in the cañon. The other man bets he doesn't. When it appears judicious we'll contrive something to draw Thurstan away for a night or two."

"But if you know the man, and it's so easy, why not make the bet yourself?" and Shackleby smiled pleasantly.

"Because I'm not secretary hoping to get my salary doubled and a land bonus. There are other reasons, but I don't want to hurt your feelings any more than I wish to lacerate those of my worthy colleagues. They'll ask no questions and only pass a resolution thanking you for your zealous services. Nothing is going to slip up the wrong way, but if it did you could only lose your salary, and I'd see you safe on the way to Mexico with say enough to start a store, and you would be no worse off than before, because I figure you'd lose the berth certain unless you chip in with me."

Leslie realised that this might well be so, but he made a last attempt. "Suppose in desperation I turned round on you?"

"I'd strike you for defamation and conspiracy, publish certain facts in your previous record, and nobody would believe you, or dare to say so. Besides, you haven't got grit enough in you by a long way, and that's why I'm taking your consent for granted. By the way, I forgot to mention that confounded Britisher raked an extra hundred dollars out of me. Said I'd got to pay for his travelling and hotel expenses. I'm not charging you, Leslie, and you ought to feel grateful to me."



## CHAPTER XXIII

### AN UNEXPECTED ALLY

WINTER was drawing towards its close at last, when, on the evening of a day during which the result of a heavy blasting charge had exceeded his utmost expectations, Geoffrey Thurstan stood beside his foreman in his workmen's mess shanty. Tin lamps hung from the beams blackened with their smoke, and sturdy men were finishing their six o'clock supper beneath them. They were the pick of the province, for, until tempted by the contractor's high wages, most of them had been engaged in laying the foundations of its future greatness by wresting new spaces for corn and cattle from the forest, and fed, as they worked, heroically. The supper was also varied and bountiful, for Geoffrey, who was conscious of a thrill of pride as he glanced down the long rows of weather-beaten faces, fed his workmen well. They had also served him faithfully through howling gale and long black night, under scorching sun and bitter frost, and now the result of that day's operations had brought the end of the campaign in sight, there was satisfaction in the knowledge that he had led such men.

"They're a fine crowd, Tom, and I'll be sorry to part with them," he said. "It's hard to believe, after all we have struggled with, that less than three weeks will see us through, but I'd give many dollars for every hour we can reduce the time by. Send for a keg of the hardest cider and I'll tell them so."

There was applause when the keg was lifted to the table with its head stove in, and Geoffrey, who



## An Unexpected Ally

filled a tin dipper, said, "Here's my best thanks for the way you have backed me, boys. Since they carried the railroad across Beaver Creek, few men in the province have grappled as you have with a task like this; but it's sometimes just possible to go a little better than what looks like one's best, and I'm asking it as a favour from all of you. I estimate we'll finish this tough section in eighteen days from now, but I want the work done in less, and accordingly I'll promise a bonus to every man if we can fire the last big shot a fortnight to-day."

"Stan' by!" said a big section foreman as he hove himself upright. "Fill every can up an' wait until I've finished. Now, Mr Thurstan, I'm talking for the rest. You've paid us good wages, an' we've earned them, every cent, though that wasn't much to our credit, for Tom from Mattawa saw we did. Still, even dollars won't buy everything, and what you can't pay us for we're open to give. If flesh an' blood can do it, a fortnight will see us through, an' the next contract you take, if it's to wipe out the coast range or run off the Pacific, we're coming along with you. I've nailed you to the bargain, boys, an' here's — The Boss, victorious, an' to — with his bonus!"

The long shanty rang to the roar that followed, and, when it died away, Geoffrey, who set down his can, turned to his foreman.

"Who is the little man next to Walla Jake?" he asked.

"An old partner of his from Oregon. Came in one day when you were away, and, as Jake allowed he was a square man, I took him on. Found him worth his money, and fancied I'd told you."

"You did not," said Geoffrey. "Jake's quite trustworthy, but watch the stranger well. No doubt he's honest, but I'm getting nervous now we're so near the end."

The foreman answered reassuringly, and Geoffrey, who turned away, rode beneath the snow-sprinkled firs to Savine's ranch. It was late when he reached

## His Master Purpose

it, but his partner and Helen were expecting him, and the former sighed with satisfaction when Geoffrey said,—

"In all probability we shall fire the decisive shot a fortnight to-day."

"It is great news," said Julius Savine. "As I have said already, it was a lucky day for me—and mine—when I first fell in with you. Two more anxious weeks and then the suspense will be over and I can contentedly close my career. Lord! it will be well worth the living for—the consummation of the most daring scheme ever carried out in the Mountain Province. I won't see your next triumph, Geoffrey, but it can hardly be greater than this you have won for me."

"You exaggerate, sir," said Geoffrey. "It was you who won the concession and overcame all the initial difficulties, while we would never have gone so far without your assistance. Such a task would have been far beyond me alone."

"No—though it is good of you to say so. There were times when I tried to fancy I was running the contract, but that was just a sick man's craze. You have played out the game well and gracefully, Geoffrey, as only a true man could. Perhaps Helen will thank you—just now I don't feel quite equal to it."

Savine's voice broke a little, and he glanced at Helen, who sat very still with downcast eyes. Geoffrey also looked at her for a second, and his elation was tinged with bitterness. He could see she was troubled, and without the one prize he had striven for the victory would be barren to him. Still, he desired to save her embarrassment, and when she raised her head to obey her father, broke in,—

"Miss Savine can place me under an obligation by firing the fateful charge instead. It was her first commission which brought good luck to me, and it is only fitting she should complete the result of it by turning the firing key."



## An Unexpected Ally

Helen's eyes expressed her gratitude, as, consenting, she turned them upon the speaker, and Geoffrey, rising to the occasion, said,—

"Did you ever hear the story of the first contract I undertook in British Columbia, sir? May I tell it your father, Miss Savine?"

Helen was quick to appreciate his motive, and allowed him to see it; while, seizing the opportunity to change the subject, Geoffrey told the story whimsically. Humour was not his strong point, but he was capable of brilliancy just then. In any case, Julius Savine laughed heartily, and when the tale was finished all had settled down to their normal manner, which was what the narrator had striven for. When he took his leave, however, Helen followed him into the verandah, and held out her hand. She stood close to him with the moonlight full upon her, and it was only by an effort the man who gripped the slender fingers hard conquered his desire to draw her towards him. Helen had never looked so desirable. Then he dropped her hand, and stood impassively still, waiting for what she had to say.

"I could not thank you before my father, but neither could I let you go without a word," she said, with a quiet composure which, because she must have guessed at the struggle within him, was the badge of courage. "You have won my undying gratitude, and—"

"That is a great deal, very well worth the winning," said the man. "It will be one pleasant memory to carry away with me."

"To carry with you! You are not going away?" said Helen, with an illogical sense of dismay, which was not, however, in the least apparent. She knew that any sign of it would provoke the crisis she shrank from.

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "Once this work is completed, I shall seek for another field."

"You must not!" and though her voice was strained, Helen, who dared not do otherwise, looked

## His Master Purpose

him steadily in the eyes. "You must not go. Now, when if you stay in the Province fame and prosperity lie within your grasp you will not overwhelm me by adding to the knowledge of all I have robbed you of. It is hard for me to express myself plainly—but I dare not take this from you, too."

"Can you not guess how hard it all is for me?" and the man strode a few paces apart from his companion while the words fell almost savagely from his lips. Then he halted again and turned towards her, while his forehead grew furrowed.

"I had not meant to distress you—but how can I go on seeing you so near me, hearing your voice, when every word and smile stirs up a longing that at times almost maddens me? What I have done I did for you, and did it gladly, but this new command I cannot obey. Fame and prosperity! What are either worth to me when the one thing I would sell my life for is, so you have told me, not to be attained?"

"I am sorry," said Helen, whose breath came faster, feeling thankful the speaker now looked moodily down the valley. "More sorry than I can well express. I dare not ruin a bright future for you. Is there nothing I can say that will prevent you?"

"Only one thing," and Geoffrey moving nearer looked down upon her until his gaze impelled Helen to look up. There was no longer any trace of passion in his face, which in spite of its firm set had grown, as it were, gentle.

"Only one thing," he repeated. "Please listen—it is necessary even if it hurts you. I cannot blame you for my own folly, but the latter is incurable. You are a dutiful daughter, with an almost exaggerated idea of justice, and I know the power circumstances give me. Still, I am so covetous that I must have all or nothing, and love you so that I dare not use it. Nevertheless, I will not despair even yet, and some day when, perhaps, absence has



## An Unexpected Ally

hidden some of my shortcomings, I will come back and beg speech with you."

"You are very generous," and the words vibrated with sincerity. "Once—always—I have cruelly wronged you—" but here Geoffrey raised his hand and looked at the speaker with a wry smile that had no mirth in it.

"You have never done so, Miss Savine. Once you spoke with a marvellous accuracy, and I am not generous, only so unusually wise that you must have inspired me. I cannot be content with less than the best, and what that is—again, if I am brutal you must remember I cannot help my nature—I will tell you."

He stooped, and, before she realised his intentions, deftly caught Helen's hands in each of his own, tightening his grip on them masterfully, until he forced her to look up at him. Helen trembled as she met his eyes. The man had spoken no more than the truth when he said he could not help his nature, and, suddenly transformed, it was the former Geoffrey Thurstan she had shrunk from who held her fast.

"Yes, I am wise. I know I could bend you to my will now, and that afterwards you would hate me for it," he said. "I—I would not take you so, not if you came to me. Further, for we have dropped all disguises, and face the naked truth, I have striven, and starved, and suffered for you, risked my life often—and you shall not cheat me of my due, which alone is why, because my time is not come yet, I presently go away. The one reward that will satisfy me is this, that of your own will you will once more hold my hands and say, 'I love you, Geoffrey Thurstan,' and I can wait with patience—for you will, some day."

He stooped, and Helen felt choking; but it was only her fingers his lips burned hot upon, and next moment he had gone, while she leaned breathless against the balustrade, gazing after him.

## His Master Purpose

Geoffrey never glanced behind him until, when some distance from the ranch, he reined his horse in, and, though there was hard frost in the air, wiped his forehead. He had yielded at last to an uncontrollable impulse which was perhaps part of his inheritance from the old moss troopers, who had carried off their brides on the crupper. But the first part of the interview had tried him. As he did so, a muffled beat of horse's hoofs came up the trail, and he fancied he heard a voice say, "The twentieth—I'll be ready."

Then a mounted figure appearing for a moment, vanished among the firs; and Geoffrey, turning back to camp, noticed that beside the hollows the hoofs had made, there was the print of human feet in the powdery snow.

"There is nothing to bring any rancher down this way, and a man must have walked beside him. Who on earth could it be?" he said; then, dismissing the subject in the meantime, went on his way. It was only afterwards that the significance of the footprints became apparent.

There was a light in Geoffrey's quarters when at last he approached them, and the foreman met him at the door. "That blame waster, Black, has come back. Rode in quietly after dark, and none of the boys have set eyes on him," he said; and, noting his master's surprise, added with a chuckle, "I put him in there for safety, and waited right here to take care of him."

Geoffrey went into the shanty, carefully closed the door, and turned somewhat sternly upon the visitor. Black's outer appearance suggested a degree of prosperity, but his face was anxious as he said, "I guess you're surprised to see me?"

"I am," was the answer. "In view of the fact that it is my duty to hand you over to the nearest magistrate, that is hardly astonishing."

"No," said Black. "Still, I don't think you'll do it. Anyway, you've got to listen to a little story

## An Unexpected Ally

first. You didn't hear the whole of it last time. I figure I can trust you to do the square thing."

"Be quick, then," and Geoffrey leaned against the table while his visitor commenced,—

"You've heard of the Blue Bird mine, and how one of the men who relocated the lapsed claim was found in the river with a gash a rock might have made in the back of his head? Of course you have. Well, it was me and Rob Morgan who located the Blue Bird. Morgan was a good prospector, but the indications were hazy, and he got drunk when he could. I knew mighty little of minerals, and we done nothing with it until the time to put in our legal improvements was nearly up. Then Morgan lit on to rich pay ore, and we worked night and day, but we weren't quite quick enough—one night two jumpers pulled our stakes up. Oh, yes, they had the law behind them, for says the Crown, 'Unless you've developed your claim within the legal limit it lapses, and any free miner can relocate.'"

"Come to the point," said Thurstan. "I'm sleepy."

"I'm coming;" and Black continued, "Morgan had no grit. He got on to the whisky, and talked about shooting himself. I swore I'd shoot the first of the other crowd who set foot on the claim instead, and half the boys who started driving pegs all round us heard me. There was a doubt as to whether the jumpers had hit the time putting their stakes in, and the boys were most for me, but as usual the thieves had a man with dollars behind them. His name was Shackleby."

"Ah! I begin to understand things now," said Geoffrey.

"I was sitting alone in my tent at night when one of them jumpers came in," Black continued, unheeding. "All the rest were sleeping, and the bush was very still. He'd a roll of dollar bills to give me if I'd light out quietly. Said I'd nothing to stand on, but the man behind him didn't want to figure in the papers if it went to court. Well, I wouldn't take the



## His Master Purpose

money, and ran him out of my tent. When he touched his pistol, I had an axe in my hand, and it was a poor man's luck that one of the boys must come along. When he'd slouched off, I began to hanker for the money, went after the jumper to see if I could raise his price, missed him and came back again, but I struck his tracks in the mud beside a creek, with another man's hoof-marks behind them. Well, next morning that jumper was found in the river with no money in his wallet, and the boys looked black at me until I had an interview with Mr Shackleby. He'd fixed the whole thing up good enough to hang me, and nailed me down to blame hard terms as the price of my liberty. You're getting tired—no? Shackleby got the Blue Bird, and kept his claws on me until his man, Leslie, sent me up to bust your machines; but Shackleby has worn me thin, until I'm ready to stand my trial sooner than run any more of his mean jobs for him; and now, to cut the long end off, do you believe me?"

"I think I do," said Geoffrey. "What made you bolt from here, and what do you want from me? Is it the same promise as before?"

Black related the incidents of his abduction, then raised his right hand with a dramatic gesture as he concluded, "As I have been a liar, this is gospel truth, s'help me. Whoever killed that jumper—and I figure Shackleby knows—it wasn't me. The night you fished me out of the river I said, 'Here's a man with sand enough to stand right up to Shackleby,' and I'll make a deal with you."

"The terms?" said Geoffrey.

"Rather better than before. On your part, a smart lawyer to take my case if Shackleby sets the police on me. On mine—with you behind me, I can tell a story that will bring two Companies down on Shackleby. What brought me to the scratch now was, that I read in *The Colonist* that you'd be through shortly, and I guessed Shackleby's insect, Leslie, would have another shot at you. I'm open to



## An Unexpected Ally

take my chances of hanging to get even with them."

The mingled fear and hatred in the speaker's face was certainly genuine, and Geoffrey said briefly, "If I thought you guilty, I'd slip irons on to you. As it is, I'm willing to close that deal. You'll have to take my word and lie quiet, until you're wanted, where I hide you."

"I guess that is good enough for me," said Black, exultantly.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### MILLCENT'S REVOLT

"I REALLY feel mean over it, and, of course, I will pay you back, but unless I get the money to meet the call, I shall have to sacrifice the stock," said Henry Leslie, glancing furtively at his wife across the breakfast-table.

Leslie was seldom at his best in the morning, but he seemed unusually nervous, and the coffee-cup shook in his fingers as he raised it.

"It's the last I'll ask you for," he continued, "and if you press him, Thurstan will sign the cheque. He said he was coming, did he not?"

"Yes," was the answer. "Here is his note. It must be the last, Harry, for I have overdrawn my allowance already. You will notice that Geoffrey hesitates, and will not sign the cheque without seeing me. He will be here on Thursday."

Leslie took the letter with an eagerness which did not escape his wife, while, as the sum in question was small, she could not quite understand the satisfaction in his face. It had grown soddened and coarse of late, and there were times when she looked upon her husband with positive disgust. Still, she had, in spite of occasional disputes, resumed her efforts to play the part of a dutiful wife, and it was easier to pay her husband money than respect, the more so because he had usually some specious excuse, which appealed both to her ambition and gambling instinct. At times he handed her small sums, said to be her share of the profits on speculations, for which he required the loans.

## Millicent's Revolt

"'Pressure of work, but must make an effort to see you as you suggest,'" Leslie read aloud. "H'm! 'Limit exceeded already. Will be in town, and try to call upon you on Thursday.'"

"It is very good of him," said Millicent. "He evidently finds every minute precious, and I am very reluctant to bring him here. I gather that, except for my request, he would have deferred his other business. Still, I suppose you must have the money, Harry?"

"I must," was the answer, and Leslie, who did not look up, busied himself with his plate. "Better write that you expect him, and I will post the note. By the way, I must remind you that we take the Eastern Fishery delegates their steamer trip the day after to-morrow, and though there may be rather a mixed company, I want you to turn out smartly, and get hold of the best people. It would be well to see a mention of the handsome Mrs Leslie in the newspaper report."

Millicent frowned. She was a vain woman, but she had some genuine pride, and there were limits to her forbearance, while, by the time her husband had induced her to withdraw her refusal to accompany him at all, it was too late to further discuss Thurstan's visit, which was exactly what he desired. Accordingly, he set out for his office, with a letter in his hand, well pleased with himself.

Mrs Leslie had reason to remember the steamer excursion. A party of leading and other citizens had been invited to accompany the Fishery delegates on the maritime picnic, organised for the purpose of displaying the facilities that coast afforded for the prosecution of a new industry. It was difficult for the committee to draw a rigid line, and the company was decidedly mixed, more so than even Millicent at first surmised. Her husband, who acted as marshal, was kept busy most of the time, but she noticed a swift look of annoyance on his face when, before the steamer sailed, a tastefully-dressed young

## His Master Purpose

woman ascended the gangway he was receiving the guests at. There was nothing suspicious in the appearance of the lady or her elderly companion, and yet Millicent felt that Leslie was troubled by their presence, and hesitated to let them pass. The younger lady, however, smiled upon him in a manner that suggested they had met before, and Leslie stood aside when Shackleby beckoned him with what looked like an ironical grin. Then the gangway was run in, and the engines started.

It was a mild day for the season, and Millicent, who found friends, dismissed the subject in the meantime, when she saw that her husband exchanged no word with his latest guests. She was sitting with a young married lady, where the sun shone pleasantly in the shelter of the great white deck-house, when a sound of voices came out, with the odour of cigar smoke, from an open window.

"You fixed it all right?" said one which sounded familiar, and there was a laugh which, though muffled, was more familiar still, but while, with curiosity excited, Millicent listened, her companion broke in,—

"Where's Mr Leslie? I have scarcely seen him all morning."

"Making himself useful as usual. Discoursing on fisheries and harbours of which he knows nothing to men who know a good deal, and no doubt doing it very neatly," said Millicent, smiling.

"Why do you let him?" asked the other, with a little gesture of pride, which became her. "Now, my husband knows better than stay away from me, even if he wanted to. Ah, here he is, bringing good things from the sunny South piled up on a tray."

Perhaps it was the contrast, for Millicent felt both resentful and neglected when a young man approached carrying choice fruit and cakes upon a nickelled tray, but before he reached them a voice came through the window again, "You're quite certain? That man has eyes all over him, and it won't do to take any chances with him. He must be kept



## Millicent's Revolt

right here in Vancouver all night, and the game will be in our own hands before he gets back again."

"I've done my best," was the answer, and Millicent fancied, but was not certain, it was her husband who spoke. "I have fixed things so that he will come to Vancouver. The only worry is, can we depend upon the fellow I laid the odds with?"

"Oh, yes," said the second voice. "I guess he knows better than fail me. By the way, you nearly made a fool of yourself over Coralie."

"Somebody inside there talking secrets," said the younger lady. "I think it is Mr Shackley, and I don't like that man. Charley, set down that tray and carry my chair and Mrs Leslie's at least a dozen yards away. He's a pernicious insect, and might be infectious."

Millicent, at the risk of being guilty of eaves-dropping, would have greatly preferred to stay where she was, but when the man did his wife's bidding, she could only follow and thank him. Still, lifting a cluster of fruit from the tray, she asked one question.

"Can you tell me, Mr Nelson, who is Coralie?"

Nelson looked startled for a moment, and found it necessary to place another folding chair under the tray. Neither did he answer until his wife said,—

"Didn't you hear Mrs Leslie's question, Charley? Who is Coralie?"

"Sounds like the name of a variety actress," said the man, by no means glibly. "Why should you ask me? I really don't know. I'm not good at con-undrums. Isn't this a beautiful view? I fancied you'd have a better appetite up here than amid the crowd below."

Millicent's curiosity was further excited by the speaker's manner, but she could only possess her soul in patience, until presently it was satisfied on one point at least. She sat alone for a few minutes on the steamer's highest deck against the coloured glass dome of the great white and gold saloon. Several of the brass-guarded lights were open wide,

## His Master Purpose

and, hearing a burst of laughter, she looked down. The young woman who had spoken to her husband at the gangway sat at a corner table, partly hidden by two carved pillars below. She held a champagne glass in a lavishly jewelled hand, and there was no doubt she was pretty, but there was that in her suggestive laugh and mocking curve of the full red lips which set Millicent's teeth on edge. If more were needed, a rich mine promoter sat near her, trying to whisper confidentially, and another man, whose name was notorious in the city, laughed as he watched them; but Millicent had seen sufficient, and turning her head, looked out to sea. There where, however, several men apparently smoking on the opposite side of the dome, and one of them must also have looked down, for his comment was audible.

"They're having what you call a good time down there! Who and what is she?"

"Ma'mselle Coralie. Ostensibly a *clairvoyante*," was a comrade's dry reply.

"*Clairvoyante*!" repeated the first unseen speaker, who, by his clean intonation, Millicent set down as a newly-arrived Englishman. "Do you mean a professional soothsayer?"

"Something of the kind," said the other with a laugh. "We're a curious people marching in the forefront of progress, so we like to think, and yet we consult hypnotists and all kinds of fakirs even about our business. Walk down — Street and you'll see half-a-dozen of their name-plates. When they're young and handsome they get plenty of customers, and it's suspected that Coralie, with assistance, runs a select gambling bank of evenings. Neither is the charlatan tied to one profession."

"I catch on—correct phrase, isn't it?" said the Englishman. "Of course you're liberal minded and free from effete prejudice, but I hardly fancied the wives of your best citizens would care to meet such ladies."



## Millicent's Revolt

"They wouldn't if they knew it!" was the answer. "Coralie's a newcomer; they're birds of passage, and before she grows too famous the police will move her on. In fact, I've been wondering how she got on board to-day."

"Leslie passed her up the gangway," said another man, adding, with a suggestive laugh as he answered another question, "Why did he do it? Well, perhaps he's had his fortune told, or you can ask him. Anyway, although I think he wanted to, he dare not turn her back."

Millicent, rising, slipped away, and, hot with rage, was glad to lean upon the steamer's rail. She had discovered long ago that her husband was not a model of virtue, but the knowledge that his shortcomings were common property was particularly bitter to her. Of late she had dutifully endeavoured to live on good terms with him, and it was galling to discover that he had only, so it seemed, worked upon her softer mood for the purpose of extorting money to lavish upon illicit pleasures. She felt no man could sink lower than that, and determined there should be a reckoning that very night.

"My dear Mrs Leslie," said a voice beside her. "Why, you look quite ill. My husband brought a bottle of stuff guaranteed to cure steamboat malady. Run and get it, Charley," and Millicent turned to meet her young married friend.

"Please don't trouble, Mr Nelson. I am not in the least sea-sick," she said. "You might, however, spread out that deck chair for me. It is a passing faintness which will leave me directly."

Millicent remembered nothing about the rest of the voyage, except that, when the steamer reached the wharf, her husband, who helped her down the gangway, said,—

"I have promised to go to the conference and afterwards dine with the delegates, Millicent, so I daresay you will excuse me. I shall not be late if I can help it, and you might wait up for me."



## His Master Purpose

Millicent, who had intended to do this in any case, merely nodded, and went home alone. She sat beside the English pattern hearth all evening with an open book upside down upon her knee, and her eyes turned towards the clock, which very slowly ticked the last hours she would spend beneath her husband's roof away. There was spirit in her, and though she hardly knew why, she dressed herself for the interview carefully, while when Leslie entered, his eyes expressed admiration as she rose with cold dignity and stood before him. Leslie was sober, but unfortunately for himself nothing more, for the delegates had been treated with lavish Western hospitality, and there had been many toasts to honour during the dinner. He leaned against the wall with one hand on a carved bracket, looking down upon her with what seemed to be a leer of brutal pride upon his slightly-flushed face.

"You excelled yourself to-day, Millicent. I saw no end of folks admiring you," he said. "Most satisfactory day! Everything went off famously! Enjoyed yourself, eh?"

"I can hardly say I did, but that is not what you asked me to wait for," was the cold answer, and Millicent with native caution waited to hear what the man wanted before committing herself.

"No. I meant it, but it wasn't. I couldn't help saying I was proud of you," and Leslie paused, doubtless satisfied, so the woman thought, that he had smoothed the way sufficiently by a clumsy compliment. His abilities were not at their best just then. Millicent's thin lips curled scornfully as she listened.

"Thurstan will be here on Thursday," he continued. "Never liked the man, but he has behaved decently as your trustee, and I want to be fair to him. Besides, he's a rising genius, and it's as well to be on good terms with him. Couldn't you get him to stay dinner and talk over the way they've invested your legacy?"



## Millicent's Revolt

"Do you think he would care to meet you?" asked Millicent, cuttingly.

"Perhaps he mightn't. You could have the Nelsons over, and press of business might detain me. Anyway, you'll have no time to settle all about that money and your English property if he goes out on the Atlantic train. You two seem to have got quite friendly again, and I'm tolerably sure he'd stay if you asked him."

Millicent's anger was rising all the time, but, because her suspicions increased with it, she kept herself in hand. Feeling certain this was part of some plot, and her husband was not steady enough to carry out his *rôle* cleverly, she desired to discover his exact intentions before denouncing him.

"Why should I press him?"

Had it been before the dinner Leslie might have acted more discreetly. As it was, he looked at the speaker somewhat blankly. "Why? Because I want you to. Now don't ask troublesome questions or put on your tragedy air, Millicent, but just promise to keep him here until after the east-bound train starts, anyway. I'm not asking for caprice—I—I particularly want a man to see him who will not be in the city until the following day."

Then, remembering what she had heard outside the steamer's deck house, a light suddenly broke in upon the woman. The man whose keen eyes would interfere with Shackleby's plans must be Thurstan, and it was evident there was a scheme on hand to wreck his work in his absence. Once she had half-willingly assisted her husband to Thurstan's detriment, but much had changed since then, and remembering that she had already, without knowing it, played into the confederate's hands by writing him, her indignation mastered her.

"I could not persuade him against his wishes, and would not do so if I could," she said, turning full upon the man.

"You can and must," said Leslie, whose passion

## His Master Purpose

blazed up, in answer. "I'm about sick of your obstinacy and dramatic situations. They don't impress me. You could do anything with any man you laid yourself out to inveigle, as I know to my cost, and in this case—by the Lord, I'll make you!"

"I will not!" and Millicent's face was white with anger as she fixed her eyes on him. "For a few moments you shall listen to me. What you and Shackleby are planning does not concern me; but I will not move a finger to help you. Once before you said—what you have done—and if I have never forgotten it I tried to do so. This time I shall do neither. I have borne very much from you already, but, sunk almost to your level as I am, there are things I cannot stoop to countenance. For instance, the draft I am to cajole from Thurstan is not intended for a speculation in mining shares, but—for Coralie."

The little carved bracket came down from the wall with a crash, and Leslie, whose face was swollen with fury, gripped the speaker's arm savagely. "After to-morrow you can do just what pleases you and go where you will," he said, "but in this I will make you obey me. As to Coralie, somebody has slandered me. The money is for what I told you, and nothing else."

Millicent with an effort wrenched herself free. "It is useless to protest, for I would not believe your oath," she said, looking at him steadily with contempt showing in every line of her pose. "Obey—you! As the man I, with blind folly, abandoned for you warned me, you are too abject a thing. Liar, thief, have I not said sufficient?—adulterer!"

"Quite!" said the man, who yielded to the murderous fury which had been growing upon him, and leaning down struck her brutally upon the mouth. "What I am you have made me—and, by Heaven, it is time I repaid you in part."

Millicent staggered a little under the blow, which



## Millicent's Revolt

had been a heavy one, but her wits were clear, and, moving swiftly to a bell button, the pressure of her finger was answered by a tinkle below.


"I presume you do not wish to make a public scandal," she said thickly, for the lace handkerchief she removed from her smarting lips was stained with blood. Then, as their Chinese domestic appeared in the doorway, "Your master wants you, John."

Before Leslie could grasp her intentions she had vanished, there was a rustle of drapery on the stairway, followed by the jar of a lock, and he was left face to face with the stolid Asiatic.

"Wantee someling, sah?" the latter said.

Leslie glared at him speechless until the alien commenced again, "Linga linga bell; too much hullee, John quick come. Wantee someling. Linga linga bell."

"Go to the devil. Oh, get out before I throw you," roared Leslie, and John vanished with the waft of a blue gown, while Millicent's book crashed against the door close behind his head.



## CHAPTER XXV

### A RECKLESS JOURNEY

THE rising moon hung low above the lofty pines behind the city when Millicent sank shivering into a chair beside the window. Under the impact of the blow her teeth had gashed her upper lip, but she did not feel the pain as she sat with hands clenched, looking down on the blaze of silver that grew broader across the inlet. She was faint and dizzy, incapable as yet of definite thought, but confused memories flashed through her brain, one among them more clearly than the rest. Instead of land-locked water shimmering beneath the Western pines she saw dim English beeches with the coppery disc of the rising moon behind, and a tall man speaking with stinging scorn to one who cowered before him among the shadows.

"I was mad that night, and have paid for the madness ever since. Now when it is too late I know what I have lost," she said.

There was a heavy step on the stairway, and Millicent shrank with the nausea of disgust as somebody tried the door; then she drew a deep breath of relief, when the steps passed on unevenly, and the memories returned. They led her through a long succession of mistakes, falsehoods, slights and wrongs up to the present, and she shivered again while a heavy drop of blood splashed warm upon her hand. Then she was mistress of herself once more, and a hazy purpose grew into definite shape. She could at least warn the man she had wronged, and so make partial reparation, while, for the moment, it was not



## A Reckless Journey

a desire for revenge upon her husband which chiefly prompted her. Smarting with shame, she only wished to escape from him. After the day's revelations she could never forgive that blow. Millicent was also a woman of action, and it was a relief to consider practical details. She decided that a telegram might lie for days at the station nearest the cañon, while what distance divided one from the other, except that it was considerable, she did not know. There was no train before noon on the morrow, and she feared the plot might be put into execution immediately Geoffrey left his camp, therefore she must reach it before he did so. Afterwards—but she would not consider the future then, and if she could but warn him nothing mattered greatly, neither physical peril nor the risk of her good name.

It was long before Millicent Leslie had thought all this out, but when once her way seemed clear, exhausted by conflicting emotions, she sank into heavy slumber, and the sun was high before she awakened. Leslie had gone to his office, and she ate a little, chose her thickest furs, and waited for noon in feverish suspense. Her husband might return and prevent her departure by force, while she feared that, should he guess her intention, a special locomotive might be hired even after the train had started. It was therefore necessary to slip away without word or sign, unless, indeed, she could mislead him, and, smiling mirthlessly, she laid an open letter inside her writing-case. At last the time came, and she went out carrying only a little hand valise, passed along the unfrequented water side to the station by the wharf, and ensconced herself in the corner of the car nearest the locomotive, counting the seconds until it should start. Once she trembled when she saw Shackleby hurry along the platform, but she breathed again when he hailed a man leaning out from the vestibule of a car. Then the big bell clanged, and the Atlantic express, rolling out of the depot, commenced its race across the continent.

## His Master Purpose

It was nearly dusk when, with a scream of brakes, the cars lurched into a desolate mountain station, and Millicent shivered as she alighted in the frost-dried dust of snow. A nipping wind sighed down the valley, the tall firs on the hillside were fading into phantom battalions of climbing trees, and above them towered a dim chaos of giant peaks, weirdly awe-inspiring under the last faint glimmer of the dying day. A few lights blinked among the lower firs, and Millicent, hurrying towards them at the station agent's direction, was greeted by the odours of coarse tobacco as she pushed open the door of the New Eldorado saloon.

A group of bronze-faced men, some in jackets of fringed deerskin and some in coarse blue jean, sat about the stove, and, though she could not help it, there was no reason why Millicent should shrink from their presence. They were rude of aspect, on occasion more rude of speech, but in all the essentials that become a man she would have found few to surpass them in either English or Western cities. There was dead silence as she entered, and the others copied him when one of the loungers, rising, took off his shapeless hat, not ungracefully.

"I want a guide and good horse to take me to Thurstan's camp in the Orchard River Cañon to-night," she said.

The men looked at one another, and he who rose first said, "Sorry to disappoint you, ma'am, but it's clean impossible. We'll have snow by morning, and it's steep chances a man couldn't get through in the dark now the shelf on the waggon trail's down."

"I must go. It is a matter of life and death, and I'm willing to pay whoever will guide me proportionate to the risk," said Millicent, shaking out on the table a roll of dollar bills. Then, because she was a woman of quick perceptions, and noticed something in the big axeman's honest face, she added quickly, "I am in great distress, and disaster may follow



## A Reckless Journey

every moment lost. Is there nobody in this settlement with courage enough to help me?"

This time the listeners whispered as they glanced at the speaker sympathetically, until the big man said, "If you're willing to face the risk I'll go with you. You can put back most of them bills; but because we're poor men you'll be responsible for the horses."

Millicent felt the cold strike through her with the keenness of steel when she went out blinking into the night. Somebody lifted her to the back of a snorting horse, and a man already mounted seized its bridle. There was a shout of "Good luck!" and they had started on their adventurous journey. Loose floury snow muffled the beat of hoofs, the lights of the settlement faded behind and the two were alone in a wilderness of awful white beauty, wherein it seemed no living thing had broken the frozen silence since the world was made. Staring vacantly before her the woman saw the shoulders of the mighty peaks looming far above them through a haze of driving snow, but none fell on the lower slopes, where even the wind was still, and the steam of the horses hung in white clouds about them as they climbed, apparently for hours, past scattered vedettes of dwindling pines. Then for a few moments the man checked the horses on the brink of a chasm filled with eddy mist and the roar of water rising from far below.

"That should have been our way, but the whole blame trail slipped down into the valley," he said. "Let me take hold of your bridle and trust to me. We're going straight over the spur yonder until we strike the trail again."

It was no longer a ride but a scramble. Even those sure-footed beasts stumbled continually, and where the wind had swept the thin snow away, the iron on the sliding hoofs clanged on ice-streaked rock, or hundredweights of loose gravel rattled down the incline. Then there was juniper to be struggled



## His Master Purpose

through, and slopes almost precipitous up which the panting guide somehow dragged the horses one at a time, but, one strong with muscular vigour and the other sustained by sheer force of will, the pair held stubbornly on. Millicent had risen superior to physical weakness that night.

"Four hours to the big divide! We've pretty well equalled Thurstan's record," said the guide, striking a match inside his hollowed palm to consult his watch. "It's all down grade now, but we'll meet the wind in the long pass and maybe the snow."

Millicent's heart almost failed her when, as the match went out, she gazed down into the gulf of darkness that opened at her feet, but she answered steadily, "Press on. I must reach the camp by daylight, whatever happens."

They went on. The pace, instead of a scramble, became in places a wild glissade, and no beast of burden but a mountain pack-horse could have kept its footing ten minutes. Dark pines rose up from beneath them and faded behind, here and there a scarred rock or whitened boulder flitted by, and then the woman's sight was dimmed by a whirling haze of snow. How long it lasted she did not know. She could see nothing through the maze of eddying flakes but that a figure, magnified by them to gigantic proportions, rode close beside her, until they left the cloud behind and wound along the face of a declivity, which dipped into empty blackness close beneath.

Suddenly her beast blundered in its stride; there was a flounder and a shock, and Millicent felt herself sliding very swiftly down a long slope of crusted snow. She screamed once hoarse with terror, then something seized and held her fast, and she rose, shaking in every limb, to cling breathless to the guide.

"Hurt bad?" he gasped. "No!—I'm mighty glad. Snow slide must have gouged part of the trail out.



## A Reckless Journey

Can you hold up a minute while I 'tend to the horse?"

"I don't think I am much hurt," stammered Millicent, whose teeth were chattering, and the man floundering back a few paces, stooped over a dark object that struggled in the snow. He also, she fancied, fumbled at his belt, after which there was a horrible gurgle, and he returned rubbing his fingers suggestively with a handful of snow.

"Poor brute's done for—I had to settle him," he explained. "It will cost you—but we can fix that when we get through. I'll have to change your saddle, and the sooner we get on the better. Won't keep you five minutes, ma'am."

Millicent felt very cold and sick, for the unfortunate horse still struggled feebly, while the gurgle continued, and she was devoutly thankful when they continued their journey. It was, if possible, more arduous than before. At times they forced a passage through climbing forest, and again over slopes of treacherous shale where a snow slide had ploughed a great hollow in the breast of the hill, while the puffs of snow which once more met them grew thicker, until the woman was sheeted white all over, and at last the man said, "It can't be far off daylight and I'm mighty thankful. I've lost my bearings, but we're on a trail, which must lead to somewhere, at last. Stick tight to your saddle and I'll bring you through all right, ma'am."

Millicent was too cold to answer. A blast that whirled the drifts up met her in the face, numbing all her faculties, rendering breathing difficult, and the hand that held the bridle was stiffened into uselessness. Still, while life pulsed within her she was going on, and swaying in the saddle fixed her eyes ahead. At last the trail grew level, the snow thinner, and in the growing light of day a cluster of roofs loomed up before her, and she made some incoherent answer when the man said, "I struck the wrong way at the forking of the trail. Here's a ranch, however,

## His Master Purpose

and the camp can't be far away. Horse is used up and so am I, but you could get somebody to take Thurstan a message."

Some minutes later he lifted Millicent bodily from the saddle, and she leaned against him almost powerless as he pounded on the door. The loud knocking was answered by voices within, the door swung open, and Millicent reeled into a long, wood-built hall. Two women rose from beside the stove, and, for it was broad daylight now, stared in bewilderment at the strangers.

The guide leaned wearily against the wall, while Millicent, overcome by the change of temperature, stood clutching at the table and swaying to and fro. Then her eyes grew dazzled and her failing strength deserted her. Somebody who helped her into a chair presently held a cup of warm liquid to her lips. She gulped down a little, and, recovering command of her senses, found herself confronted by Helen Savine. It was a curious meeting, and even then Millicent remembered under what circumstances they had last seen each other. It appeared probable that Helen did so, too, for she showed no sign of welcome, and Mrs Thomas Savine, who picked up the fallen cup, watched them intently.

"I see you are surprised to find me here," said Millicent, with a gasp. "I left the railroad last night for Geoffrey Thurstan's camp. We lost the trail and one of the horses in the snow, and just managed to reach this ranch. We can drag ourselves no further. I did not know it belonged to you."

"That's about it!" the guide broke in. "This lady has made a journey that would have killed some men—it has pretty well used me up, anyway. I'll sit down in the corner if you don't mind. Can't keep myself right end up much longer."

"Please do!" said Helen, with a compassionate glance in his direction. "I will tell our Chinaman to see to your horse." Then she turned towards Millicent, and her face was coldly impassive. "Any-



## A Reckless Journey

one in distress is welcome to shelter here. You were going to Thurstan's camp?"

Even Mrs Savine had started at Millicent's first statement, and now fancied she read contemptuous indignation in Helen's eyes. It was certain her niece's voice, though even, was curiously strained.

"Yes!" said Millicent, rapidly. "I was going to Thurstan's camp. It is only failing strength that hinders me completing the journey. Somebody must warn him at once that he is on no account to leave for Vancouver as he promised me. There is a plot to ruin him during his absence—a traitor among his workmen, I think. At any moment the warning may be too late. He was starting west to-day to call on me."

Millicent was half-dazed and perhaps did not reflect that it was possible to draw a damaging inference from her words. Nevertheless, there was that in Helen's expression which awoke a desire for retaliation.

Helen asked but one question, "You risked your life to tell him this?" and when Millicent bent her head the guide interposed, "You can bet she did, and nearly lost it."

"Then," said the girl, "the warning must not be thrown away. Unfortunately, we have nobody I could send about just now. Auntie, you must see to Mrs Leslie; I will go myself."

"I'm very sorry, miss. If you like I'll do my best, but can hardly answer I won't fall over on the way," said the guide again, but Helen swept out of the room, and now the strain was over Millicent lay helpless in her chair. Still, she was conscious of a keen disappointment. After all she had dared and suffered it was Helen who would deliver the warning.

Thurstan was standing knee-deep in ground-up stone and mire, near a huge boring machine inside a coffer dam about which the river frothed and roared, when a man brought him word that Miss Savine waited him. He hurried to meet her, and presently

## His Master Purpose

halted beside her horse, a burly figure in shapeless slouch hat, with a muddy oilskin hanging from his shoulders above the stained overalls and long boots dripping mud.

Helen sat still in the saddle, a strange contrast to him, for she was neat and dainty down to the little foot in Indian dressed deerskin against the horse's flank. She showed no sign of pleasure as she returned his greeting, but watched him keenly as she said,—

"Mrs Leslie arrived this morning almost frozen at the ranch. She left the railroad last night to reach your camp, but her guide lost the trail."

The man was certainly startled, but his face betrayed no satisfaction. It's most visible expression was more akin to annoyance.

"Could she not have waited?" he said, so it seemed to himself; then looked at Helen, adding somewhat awkwardly, "Did Mrs Leslie explain why she wanted to see me so particularly?"

"Yes," was the dry answer. "She has reason to believe that while you journeyed to Vancouver to visit her, an attempt would be made to wreck these workings. She bade me warn you that there is a traitor in your camp."

"Ah," said Geoffrey, a flush showing through the bronze on his forehead. "It was very good of you to face the rough cold journey, but you cannot return without rest and refreshment. I will warn all my foremen, and when it seems safe ride back with you."

Now if Helen had been gifted with a wider knowledge of the seamy side of life she might perhaps have noticed several details in what had happened, proving Thurstan blameless. As it was she had a quick temper, and at first glance facts spoke eloquently against him.

"You cannot," was the cold answer. "The warning was very plain, and considering all that lies at stake you must not leave the workings a moment.

## A Reckless Journey

Neither are any thanks due to me. I am an interested party, and the person who has earned your gratitude is Mrs Leslie. The day is clear and fine, and I can dispense with an escort."

"You shall not go alone," said Thurstan, doggedly. "You can choose between my company and that of my assistant. Neither shall you go until you rest. Further, I must ask you a favour. Will you receive Mrs Leslie until I have seen her and arranged for her return? There is no married rancher within some distance, and I cannot well bring her here."

"You cannot," said Helen, whose tone was very chilly, averting her eyes. "If only on account of the service she has rendered, Mrs Leslie is entitled to such shelter as we can offer her, as long as it appears necessary."

"Thanks!" said Thurstan, gravely. "You relieve me of a difficulty," and then, stung by the girl's ill-concealed disdain into one of his former outbreaks, gripped the horse's bridle, and backed the beast so that he and its rider were more fully face to face.

"Am I not harassed sufficiently? Good Lord! do you think—" he commenced.

"I have neither the right nor desire to inquire into your motives, and am entitled to equal liberty," said Helen, who checked him. "We will, as I say, in the meantime, shelter Mrs Leslie, and, since you insist, will you ask your assistant to accompany me?"

Geoffrey, raising his hat a moment, swung round upon his heel, and blew a silver whistle.

"Tom," he said to the man who came running up, "tell John to get some coffee and the nicest things he can out in a hurry for Miss Savine. Straighten up my office room, and lay them out there. English Jim is to ride back with Miss Savine when she is ready. Send a mounted man to Allerton's to bring Black in, see no man you wouldn't trust your last dollar to lay's hand on a machine. That would stop half the work in camp? It wouldn't—confound you—you know what I mean. Call in all explosives




## His Master Purpose

from the shot-firing gang. Nobody's to slip for a moment out of sight of his section foreman."

Helen heard the crisp sharp orders as she rode up the hill, and glanced once over her shoulder. She had noticed already how the whole strength of Geoffrey's character could rise to face a crisis. Still, appearances were terribly against him.

It was about this time that Geoffrey, taking breath for a moment, scowled savagely at the river.

"If ever there was an unfortunate devil—but I suppose it can't be helped. Damn the luck that dogs me!" he said.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### MRS SAVINE SPEAKS HER MIND

MILLICENT slept brokenly while Helen carried her message, and awakening feverish, felt relieved to find her absent. Miss Savine was younger than herself, and of much less varied experience, but the look in the girl's eyes hurt her nevertheless.

"I am ashamed to force myself upon you," she said to Mrs Savine, who had shown her many small courtesies, "but I am afraid I cannot manage the journey back to the railroad to-day. I must also see Mr Thurstan before I leave for England, and it would be a great favour if I could do so here."

"We are glad to have you," said Mrs Savine, who was of kindly nature and fancied she saw her opportunity. "Yes, I just mean it. The journey has tried you so much that you are not fit for another now. Besides, I have heard so much about you, that I want a talk with you."

"You have probably heard nothing that is good," said Millicent, bitterly, and the elder lady smiled.

"I guess folks are apt to make the most of the worst points in all of us," she said. "But that is not what we are going to talk about. You are an old friend of a man we are indebted to, and, just because I believe there's no meanness in Geoffrey Thurstan, you are very welcome to the best that we can do for you. I will ask him over to meet you."

Millicent flushed. Under the circumstances she was touched by the speaker's sincerity, and grateful for the way she expressed herself. Perhaps it was



## His Master Purpose

this which prompted her to an almost involuntary outpouring of confidence.

"I am the woman who should have married him," she said.

Mrs Savine merely nodded, and dipped her needle somewhat blindly into the embroidery on her knee before she answered, "I had guessed it already. You missed a very good husband, my dear. I don't want to force your confidence, but I figure you have some distress to bear, and I might help you. I have seen a good deal of trouble in my time."

Millicent was unstable by nature. She was also excited and feverish, and afterwards wondered why a kindly word from a woman she knew so little of should excite in her such a desire for advice and sympathy. In spite of her occasional brusqueries, it was hard for anyone to say no to Mrs Savine. So Millicent answered,—

"I know it now when it is too late—no one better. You do well to believe in Geoffrey Thurstan."

Mrs Savine looked at her very keenly, then nodded. "I believe in you, too. There! I guess you can trust me."

Millicent bent her head, and her eyes were misty, while a raw wound, which the frost had nipped and marred the delicate curve of her upper lip, became painfully visible. "It is only fit that I should tell you, since I am your guest," she said, touching the scar with one finger. "That is the mark of my husband's hand, and I am leaving him for ever because I would not connive at Thurstan's ruin. He is acting as trustee for my property, and I cannot leave for England without consulting him. So much is perhaps due to you, and—because of your kindness I should not like you to think too ill of me—I will tell you the rest. To begin with, Geoffrey has never shown me anything but kindness."

Mrs Savine gently patted the speaker's arm, and Millicent related what had led up to her journey, or

## Mrs Savine Speaks Her Mind

part of it, while, when she had finished, the elder lady said,—

"You are doing a risky thing; but I can't quite blame you, and if I could, would not do it now. You will stay right here until Geoffrey has fixed up all about your journey, and you can trust me to be kind to you. Still, there's one favour I'm going to ask. I want to tell my niece as much of what you have told me as I think desirable. Remember, Geoffrey has been good to you."

For a moment Millicent's face grew hard, and her eyes almost defiant, then she smiled a little bitterly, answering, "It is his due, and can make no difference now. Tell her what seems best."

Meanwhile, Geoffrey was busy in the cañon camp. With Black and Mattawa Tom beside him, he stood holding as symbol, both of equality and authority, a bright axe in his hand, while driller, labourer, and machine-tender, wondering greatly, were passed in review before him. Black had been boarded with a trusty rancher some distance from the camp. At last a certain rock driller passed in turn, and Tom from Mattawa explained, "He's a friend of Walla Jake, and as I told you, the last man we put on."

"That's the blame reptile who backed up Shackleby's story at the Blue Bird mine," said Black, excitedly. "If there's anyone up to mischief, you bet all you've got he's the man."

"Stop there, you!" and Geoffrey's voice was sharp and stern. "Cut him down if he feels for a revolver or tries to make a break of it, section foreman. Come here, close in behind him, you two."

After a swift glance over his shoulder, the man summoned advanced scowling darkly, and obeyed Geoffrey's second command, "Stand there—now a few steps aside," leaving his footprints clear in a patch of otherwise untrodden snow.

"Good!" said Geoffrey. "Lay your templet on those marks, Tom," and when the foreman produced a paper pattern which fitted them, added, "We're



## His Master Purpose

going to make a prisoner of you, and jail you ourselves, until we can get a formal warrant. What for? Well, you're going to be tried for conspiracy among the other things. You see that pattern? It fits the foot of a man who went out one night with a spy Shackleby sent over to see how and when you would play the devil with our work in the cañon. It even shows the stump of the filed-off creeper-spike on your right boot. There's no use protesting—a friend of yours here will help us to trace your career back to the finding of the Blue Bird mine. Take him along and lock him into the galvanised store shed."

It was done, and Geoffrey turned to his foreman. "He was in the drilling gang, Tom?"

"Juss so! Working under the wall bed of the cañon."

"That lets some light on to the subject. You can dismiss the others. Come with me, Tom."

Twenty minutes later Geoffrey stood among the boulders the shrunken river left exposed near the foot of a giant cliff which, instead of overhanging, thrust forward a slanting spur into the rush of water, and so formed a bend. It was one of the main obstacles Geoffrey, who wondered at the formation, had determined to blow clear by the simultaneous shock of several heavy blasting charges. To that end a band of men had long been drilling deep holes into the projecting spur, and on the preceding day charges of high explosive had been sunk in most of them with detonators and fuses ready coupled for connection to the igniting gear. Geoffrey stood upon a boulder and looked up at the tremendous face of rock which, rising above the spur, held up the hill slope above. The stratification was looser than usual, and several mighty masses had fallen from it into the river. There were also crannies at its feet.

"You've seen all the drilled holes. Anything strike you yet?" said Mattawa Tom.

## Mrs Savine Speaks Her Mind

"Yes," was the answer. "It occurs to me that French Louis said he couldn't tally out all the sticks of giant powder he'd stowed away a week or two ago. I think you foolishly told him he couldn't count straight."

"I did," said Tom from Mattawa. "Louis ain't great at counting, and he allowed he'd never let go of the explosive store key."

"I fancy a smart mechanic could make one that would do as well," said Geoffrey. "It also strikes me, after considering the strata yonder, that if sufficient shots were fired in those crannies they would bring the whole cliff and the hillside above it down on top of us—you'll remember I cautioned you to drill well clear of the rock face itself? Now, if coupled fuses were led from the shot holes we filled to those we didn't, so that both would fire simultaneously, nobody would afterwards find anything suspicious under several thousand tons of debris. I'm inclined to think there are such fuses. Take your shovel, and we'll look for them."

They worked hard for half an hour, and then Geoffrey chuckled. Also, lifting what looked like a stout black cord from the rubble it was carefully hidden among, Mattawa Tom said, "This time I guess you've struck it dead."

"Follow the thing up," said Geoffrey.

This was done, and further searching revealed the charges he had expected, skilfully concealed in the crannies, while Geoffrey's face was grim as he said,—

"It was planned well. They would have piled half yonder shoulder of the range into the cañon if they had got their devilish will. Pull up every fuse, and fix fresh detonators to all the charges. Change every man in that gang, and never leave this spot except the section boss replaces you, until we're ready for firing. Thank Heaven that will be in a few more days, and my nerves may hold out that long. I've hardly had an hour's sleep during the last week, Tom."

## His Master Purpose

Meantime, Helen had not forgotten it was her remonstrance which had originally obtained a humble appointment for her escort, English Jim. He had also several times visited the ranch with messages, and was accordingly invited to enter when they reached it. He recognised Mrs Leslie at once, but he could be discreet, and, warned by something in her manner, addressed no word to her until he found opportunity for a few moments' private speech before leaving.

"You remember me, I see," said Millicent, and English Jim bowed.

"I do; perhaps because I have reason to. Though most reluctant to say so, I lost a valuable paper the last time I was in your presence, madam, and that paper was afterwards used against my master. Pardon me for speaking so plainly; you said you were a friend of Mr Thurstan's."

"You need not be diffident," said Millicent, checking him with a wave of her hand. "Suppose it was I who found the drawing? You would be willing to keep silence in return for—"

It was English Jim who interrupted now. "In return for your solemn promise to render no more assistance to our enemies. I do not forget your kindness, madam, and hate the painful necessity of speaking so to you, but I am Thurstan's man, soul and body."

"Your pardon," said Millicent. "Will you also credit me if I say that I lately ran some risk to bring your master a much-needed warning? I am going to England in a day or two, and shall never come back again. Therefore you can rely upon my promise."

"Implicitly," said English Jim. "You must have had some reason I cannot judge of for what you did, which sounds like presumption, doesn't it, but you can count upon my silence, madam."

"You are a good man," and Millicent impulsively held out her hand to him. "I have met very few so loyal or so charitable. May I wish you all prosperity in your career?"

## Mrs Savine Speaks Her Mind

The ex-cook merely bowed as he went out, while Millicent's eyes grew dim.

"There are good men in the world after all, though it has been my misfortune to chiefly come across the bad," she said.

"I don't know if you meant me to hear, but I quite agree with you, and I guess I've seen a good many of both kinds in my time," said Mrs Savine, who came in.

Darkness had fallen some time when Thurstan rode up to the ranch and spent half an hour alone with Millicent. He spoke to nobody else, but when he had gone Millicent said to Mrs Savine,—

"I start for England as soon as possible, and Mr Thurstan is going to the railroad with me. I shall never return to Canada."

She retired early, pleading fatigue, and for a time Mrs Savine and Helen sat silently in the glow of the great hearth which assisted the stove. There was no other light in the room, and each flicker of the crimson radiance showed that Helen's face was more than usually serious.

"Did you know that it was Mrs Leslie Geoffrey should have married?" asked Mrs Savine at length.

"No," said Helen, flushing; and added, with a tinge of bitterness, "Perhaps I ought to have guessed it. She leaves shortly, does she not? It will be a relief. She must be a wicked woman, but please don't talk of her."

"That is just what I'm going to do," said the elder lady, gravely. "I wouldn't guarantee her wholly good, but I blame her poison-mean husband more than her. Anyway, she is better than you suppose her."

"I made no charge against her, and am only glad she is going," said Helen Savine, and her aunt smiled shrewdly.

"Well, I am going to show you there is nothing in that charge. Not quite logical, is it, but sit still there and listen to me."

## His Master Purpose

Helen did so, at first very much against her will, then grew half-convinced, and at last wholly so. She also blushed crimson as she said,—

"May I be forgiven for thinking evil—but such things do happen, and though I several times convinced myself, even against the evidence of my eyes, that I was wrong, appearances were horribly against her. I am tired and will say good-night, auntie."

"Not yet," said Mrs Savine, laying a detaining grasp upon her. "Sit still, my dear, I'm only beginning. Appearances don't always count for much. Now, there's Mrs Christopher started in to copy my elixir. Oh, yes, it was like it in smell and colour, but she nearly killed poor Christopher with it."

"She said it cured him completely," interposed Helen, hoping to effect a diversion; but Mrs Savine would not be put off.

"We won't argue about that, though there'll be a coroner called in the next time she makes a fool experiment. Now I'm going to give my husband's confidences away. Hardly fair to Tom, but I'll do it, because it seems necessary, and the last time I didn't go quite far enough. To begin with. Did you know the opposition wanted to buy Geoffrey over, paying him two dollars for every one he could have made out of your father?"

"No," said Helen, starting. "It was very loyal of him to refuse. Why did he do so?"

Mrs Savine smiled good-humouredly. "I guess you think that's due to your dignity, but you don't fool me. Look into your mirror, Helen, if you really want to know. Did you hear that he put every dollar he'd made in Canada into the scheme? Of course you didn't; he made Tom promise he would never tell you. Besides—but I forgot, I must not mention that."

"Please spare me any more, auntie," interposed Helen.

## Mrs Savine Speaks Her Mind

"No mercy this time," was the answer, given almost genially. "Like the elixir which doesn't taste nice, it's good for you. You didn't know, either, for the same reason, that not long ago Tom was badly scared he'd have to let the whole thing go for lack of dollars. It would have been the end of Julius Savine if he had been forced to."

"I never thought things were so bad, but how does it concern Mr Thurstan?" said Helen with a startled air.

"They were worse! Thurstan straightened them out just in this way. A relative in England left his money between him and Mrs Leslie. There was enough to keep him safe for life if he'd let it lie just where it was, but he didn't. No, he sold out all that would have earned his income for any price he could, and piled in every cent of it to hold up Julius Savine. Now I've about got through, but I've one question to ask you. Would the man who did all that—you can see why—be likely to fool after another person's wife, even if it was the handsome Mrs Leslie?"

"No," said Helen, whose cheeks, which had grown pallid, flushed like a blush rose. "I am glad you told me, auntie, but I feel I shall never have the courage to look that man in the face again."

Mrs Savine smiled, though her eyes glistened in the firelight as she laid a thin hand on one of Helen's. It felt burning hot and the fingers quivered within her grasp.

"You will, or that will hurt him more than all," she said. "It wasn't easy to tell you this, but I've seen too many lives ruined for the want of a little commonsense talking—and I figure Jacob wouldn't come near beating Geoffrey Thurstan."

Helen rose abruptly. "The room is stiflingly hot," she said. "Auntie, you will see to father—he has been better lately—for just a little while. Mrs Crighton has asked me so often to visit her, and I really need a change. This valley has grown oppressive, and I must have time to think."



## His Master Purpose

"Yes," said Mrs Savine. "But you must by your promise to fire the final shot."

The door closed, and Mrs Savine, removing spectacles, wiped both them and her eyes as she said, "I hope the Almighty will forgive a meddling woman for interfering, knowing she means well."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### LESLIE STEPS OUT

HENRY LESLIE did not return home at noon on the day following the altercation with his wife. Millicent had an ugly temper but she would cool down if he gave her time, he said to himself. In the evening he also fell in with two business acquaintances from a mining district, who had, so they explained, visited the city for the purpose of finding diversion therein, and invited him to assist them. Leslie, though unprincipled, lacked several qualities necessary for a successful rascal, and, oppressed by the fear of Shackleby's displeasure should Thurstan return to the mountains prematurely, and uncertain what to do, he was willing to try to forget his perplexities for an hour or two.

The attempt was so far successful that he came home at midnight, somewhat unsteadily, a good many dollars poorer than when he set out, and, trying the door of his wife's room, found it locked. He did not suspect it had been locked on the outside and that Millicent had thrown the key away. He was, however, rather relieved than otherwise by the discovery, and, sleeping soundly, wakened later than usual next morning. Millicent, however, was neither at the breakfast-table nor in her own room when he prised the door open. He saw that some garments and a valise were missing, and decided that she had favoured certain friends with her company, and, returning mollified, would make peace again, as had happened before. Still, he was uneasy until he espied her writing-case with the end of a letter protruding, and, reading the latter, discovered it to be an invitation to Victoria, after which he noticed on the



## His Master Purpose

blotter the reversed impression of an addressed envelope, which showed that she had answered. Two days passed, and, hearing nothing, he grew dissatisfied again, and drafted a diplomatic telegram to the friends in Victoria, while, as it happened, Shackleby was in his office when the answer arrived.

"Has Thurstan come into town yet? You told me you saw your way to keep him here," said the latter. "Didn't you mention he had the handling of a small legacy left Mrs Leslie?"

"It is strange, but he has not arrived," was the answer. "My wife is an old friend of his, and I had counted on her help in detaining him, but, unfortunately, she considered it necessary to accept an invitation to Victoria somewhat suddenly."

"I should hardly have fancied Thurstan was an old friend of—yours," said Shackleby with a carelessness which almost blunted the sneer. "I'm also a little surprised at what you tell me, because I saw Mrs Leslie hurrying along to the Atlantic express. She couldn't book that way to Victoria."

"You must have been mistaken," said Leslie, who turned towards a clerk holding out a telegraphic envelope. He ripped it open and read the enclosure with a smothered ejaculation.

"Can't understand your wire. Mrs Leslie not here. Wrote saying she could not come."

"Excuse the liberty. I believe I have a right to inspect all correspondence," said Shackleby, coolly leaning over and picking up the message. Then he looked straight at Leslie, and there was a moment's silence before he asked, "How much does Mrs Leslie know about your business?"

"I don't know," said the anxious man in desperation. "I had to tell her a little so that she could help me."

"So I guessed!" commented Shackleby. "Now I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you can't

## Leslie Steps Out

afford to quarrel with me if I do. You're coming straight with me to the depot to find out where Mrs Leslie bought a ticket to."

"I'll see you hanged first," broke out Leslie. "Isn't it enough that you presume to read my private correspondence? I'll suffer no interference with my domestic affairs."

Shackleby laughed contemptuously. "You'll just come along instead of blustering—there's not an ounce of real grit in you. This is no time for sentiment, and you have admitted that Mrs Leslie was on good terms with Thurstan. If she has warned him, one of us at least will have to make a record break out of this country. If he doesn't, it won't be the divorce court he'll figure in."

Leslie went without further protest, and Shackleby looked at him significantly when the booking-clerk said, "If I remember right, Mrs Leslie bought a ticket for Thompson's. It's a flag station at the head of the new road that's to be driven into the Orchard Valley."

"I guess that's enough," said Shackleby. "You and I are going there by the first train too. Oh, yes, I'm coming with you whether you like it or not, for it strikes me our one chance is to bluff Thurstan into a bargain for the cessation of hostilities. It's lucky he's supposed to be uncommonly short of money."

Neither Geoffrey Thurstan, Mrs Leslie, nor Thomas Savine, who had been summoned by telegram from Vancouver and requested to accompany the former, of course, knew of this conversation, but the woman was anxious as they rode together into sight of the little flag station shortly before the Atlantic express was due. When the others dismounted, Thomas Savine remained discreetly behind. It was very cold, darkness was closing down on the deep hollow among the hills, and some little distance up the ascending line a huge freight locomotive was waiting with a string of cars behind it in a side track. Thurstan

## His Master Purpose

pointed to the fan-shaped blaze of its great head lamp.

"We have timed it well. They're expecting your train now," he said.

"I am glad," was Millicent's answer. "I shall feel easier when I am once upon the way, for all day I have been nervously afraid that Harry might arrive or something unexpected happen to detain me. There will only be time to catch the Allan boat, you say, and once the train leaves this station nobody could overtake me?"

"Of course not!" said Geoffrey, reassuringly. "It is perhaps natural that you should be apprehensive, but there is no reason for it. Whether you are doing right or wrong I dare not presume to judge, and, under the circumstances, almost wish there had been somebody else to counsel you; but if your husband has used you cruelly and you are in fear of him, I cannot venture to dissuade you. You will write me when you have settled your plans?"

"Yes," was the answer. "I have hardly been able to consider the position yet, but I will never go back to Harry. My trustees must either help me to fight him or bribe him not to molest me. It is a hateful position, but though I have suffered a good deal there are things I cannot countenance."

The hoot of a whistle came ringing up the valley, the light of another head lamp, growing brighter, flickered among the firs, and Millicent looked up at her companion as she said, "I may never see you again, Geoffrey, but I cannot go without asking you to forgive me. You do not know, and I dare not tell you, in how many ways I have injured you. I would like to think that you do not cherish any ill-will against me."

"You may be quite sure of it," was the answer, and Geoffrey smiled upon her.

"What I shall remember most clearly is how much you risked to warn me, and that the safe completion of the work I have set my heart on is



## Leslie Steps Out

due to you. We will forget all the unpleasant things that have happened in the past and meet as good friends next time, Millicent."

The woman's voice trembled a little as she said, "I hope when one by one you hear of them you will. But a last favour—you will not tell Harry where I have gone until I am safely on my way to England?"

"No," said Geoffrey, grimly. "You can depend upon that. I have not forgiven your husband, but the train is coming in and will only stop a few seconds."

With couplings clashing the long cars lurched in. Geoffrey hurried his companion into one of them, felt his hand grasped fervently, and fancied he saw a tear glisten in Millicent's eyes by the light of the flashing lamps. Then the great engine snorted, and he sprang down from the vestibule footboard as the train rolled out, and, turning back towards the station office to join Thomas Savine, found himself confronted by two men who had just alighted.

Their surprise was mutual, but Thomas Savine, who stood beside a box just hurled out of the baggage car, had his wits about him. "Here's one case, Geoffrey. The conductor opines that some fool must have labelled the others wrong, and they'll come on by first freight," he said.

This was an accurate statement, but for Millicent's sake Geoffrey was grateful that his comrade should make it so opportunely. It accounted for his presence.

"It can't be helped," he said, and then turned stiffly towards Shackleby and Henry Leslie, who waited between him and the roadway, the former coolly lighting a cigar, the latter moving restlessly to and fro.

"We want a few words with you, but didn't expect to find you here," said Shackleby, when he appeared satisfied with the cigar. "Is there any place fit to sit in at the saloon yonder?"



## His Master Purpose

"I really don't know," said Geoffrey. "Having no time to waste in conversation, neither do I care. If you have anything to say to me you can say it—very briefly—here."

Shackleby pinched his cigar, then laid his hand on Leslie's shoulder warningly, and, Savine fancied, whispered, "Keep still, you fool."

"I don't know that I can condense it," he answered airily. "Fact is, in the first place, and before Mr Leslie asks a question, I want to know whether we—that is I—can still come to terms with you. It's tolerably well-known that my colleagues are, so to speak, men of straw, and individually I figure it might be better for both of us if we patched up a compromise. I can't sketch out the rest of my programme in the open air, but, as a general idee, what do you think, Mr Savine?"

"That your suggestion comes rather late in the day," was the answer.

Shackleby said nothing for a moment, though, for it was quite dark now the train had gone, Savine could not be quite certain whether he moved against Leslie by accident or deliberately hustled him a few paces away. Geoffrey, however, felt certain that neither had seen Millicent, nor, thanks to his comrade, suspected he had just helped her on board the departing cars. Just then a deep-toned whistle vibrated across the pines, somebody waved a lantern between the metals, and the panting of the freight locomotive's pump grew silent. The track led down grade past the station towards the coast.

"Better late than never," said Shackleby. "My hand's a good one still. I'm not sure I won't call you."

"To save time I'll show you mine a little sooner than I meant to do, and you'll see the game's up," said Geoffrey, grimly. "It may prevent you worrying me during the next week or two, and you can't well profit by it. I've got Black—quite ready to go into court at any time—where you can't get at him."

## Leslie Steps Out

I've got the nearest magistrate's warrant executed on the person of your other rascal, and Black will testify as to his record, which implies the throwing of a sidelight upon your own. No doubt, to save himself, the other man will turn against you. In addition, if it's necessary, which I hardly think will be so, I have even more damaging testimony. I have sworn a statement before the said magistrate for the Crown-lands authorities, and purpose sending a copy to each of your directors individually. That ought to be sufficient, and I have no more time to waste with you."

"But you have me to settle with, or I'll blast your name throughout the province if I drag my own in the mud. Where's my wife?" snarled Leslie, apparently wrenching himself free from his confederate's restraining grasp.

"If you're bent on making a fool of yourself, and I guess you can't help it, go on your own way," interposed Shackleby, with ironical contempt.

"I have no intention of telling you. You will hear from her when she considers it advisable," and Geoffrey retained his self-command by an effort.

A whirr of driver wheels slipping on the metals came down the track, followed by a shock of couplings tightening and the snorting of a heavy locomotive, but none of the party noticed it.

"She was here; you can't deny it," shouted Leslie, who had yielded to a fit of rabid fury. He was not a courageous man, and had been held in check by fear of Shackleby, but there was some spirit in him, and, perhaps because he had injured him, had always hated Thurstan, while appearances were certainly against the latter. Now when his case seemed desperate he was, with the boldness of a rat driven into a corner, determined to tear the hand that crushed him.

"I'll take action against you. I'll blazon it in the Press. I'll close every decent house in the province against you," he continued, working himself up into a



## His Master Purpose

frenzy meanwhile. "Where have you hidden her? By Heaven, I'll make you tell me."

"Take care!" said Geoffrey, straightening himself and thrusting one big hand behind his back. "It is desperately hard for me to keep my fingers off you already, but if you say another word against your wife, look to yourself. Shackleby, you have heard him; now for the woman's sake listen to me. I have never wronged your wife by thought or word, Leslie, and the greatest indiscretion she was ever guilty of was marrying you."

"You have hidden her!" almost screamed the other. "I'll have satisfaction one way if you're too strong for me another. Liar, traitor, sed—"

Geoffrey strode forward before the last word was completed, Leslie flung up one hand, but Shackleby struck it aside in time, and something that fell from it clinked metallicly, while exactly how the catastrophe that followed happened was never quite certain. Leslie, blind with rage, however, either tripped over his confederate's outstretched foot, or lost his balance, for just as a blaze of radiance beat upon the group, he staggered, clutched at Thurstan, and missing him, stepped over the edge of the platform and fell full length between the metals.

There was a yell from a man with a lantern, a sudden hoot from the whistle of the big locomotive which towered almost above the group. Savine's face turned white under the glare of the headlamp, and with a reckless leap Geoffrey followed his enemy. Only conscious of the man's peril, he acted upon impulse without reflection.

"Good God! They'll both be smashed up," said Shackleby.

Thurstan was strong of limb and every muscle in him had been toughened by strenuous toil, but Leslie had struck his head on the metals and lay still stunned. The lift was heavy for the man who strove to raise him, and though the brakes screamed along the line of cars the great locomotive was almost upon



## Leslie Steps Out

them. Standing horrified, and, as it were, without power to move, the two spectators saw the contractor, still gripping his enemy's shoulders, heave himself erect in a supreme effort, then the cow-catcher on the engine's front struck them both, and Savine rather felt than heard a sickening thud as the huge machine swept resistlessly on. He afterwards declared the suspense which followed while the long box-cars rolled by was horrible, for nothing could be seen, and the two men shivered with the uncertainty as to what might be happening beneath the grinding wheels.

When the last car passed both leapt down upon the track, and a man joined them holding a lantern aloft. Savine stooped over Thurstan, who lay just clear of the metals, looking strangely limp.

"Another second would have done it—did I heave him clear?" he gasped, then trying to raise himself by one hand fell back with a hollow groan.

"I guess not," said the railroad servant, holding the lantern higher, and while two others ran up the light fell upon a shapeless, huddled heap. "That one has passed his checks in certain," he added.

Within ten minutes willing assistants from the tiny settlement were on the spot, stretchers were improvised, Savine had bidden the agent telegraph for a doctor, and the two victims were being slowly carried towards the New Eldorado saloon. When they were gently laid down an elderly miner familiar with accidents, who had volunteered his assistance, pointing to Thurstan, said, "This one has got his arm broken, collar-bone gone, too, but if there's nothing busted inside he'll come round. The other one has been stone dead since the loco. hit him."

There were further proffers of help from several of his comrades, who, as usual with their kind, possessed some knowledge of rude surgery, and when the best had been done for the living, Savine was drawn aside by Shackleby.

"This is what he dropped on the platform—I



## His Master Purpose

picked it up quietly," he said, holding out an ivory-handled revolver. "No use letting any ugly tales get round or raking up that other story, is it? I don't know whether Thurstan induced his wife to run off or not—from what I have heard of him I hardly think he did—but one may as well let things simmer down gracefully."

"I am grateful for your thoughtfulness," said Savine. "Probably it is more than he would have done for you. This is hardly the time to discuss such questions, but what has happened can't affect our position. Still, personally, I may not feel inclined to push merely vindictive measures against you."

"I didn't think it would," said Shackleby, with a dry smile. "If I should be wanted I'm open to describe the—accident—and let other details slide. The railroad fellows suspect nothing. Thurstan has made your side a strong one, and in a way I don't blame him. If he had stood in with me we'd have smashed up your brother completely."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A REVELATION

TWO persons were strangely affected and stirred to unexpected action by the news of Thurstan's injury, and the first of these was Julius Savine. It was late next night when his brother's messenger arrived at the ranch, for Thomas had thought of nothing but the sufferer's welfare at first, and Savine lay, a very frail, wasted figure, dozing by the stove. His sister-in-law sat busy over some netting close at hand, and the pair were startled when a man, who held out a soiled envelope, came in abruptly. Savine, who read it, tossed the paper across to the lady before he rose shakily to his feet.

"I would sooner have heard anything than that Geoffrey was badly hurt," he said; then turning towards the Chinaman, who brought the stranger in, "Get him some supper and tell Fontaine I want him at once."

"Poor Geoffrey! We must hope it is not serious," said Mrs Savine with visible distress. "But sit down. You can't help him, and may bring on a seizure by exciting yourself, Julius."

Savine, who did not answer her, remained standing until the hired hand entered. "Ride your hardest to the camp and tell Foreman Tom I'm coming over to take charge until Mr Thurstan, who has met with an accident, recovers," he said. "He's to send a spare horse and a couple of men to help the sleigh over the washed-out trail. Come back at your best pace. I must reach the cañon before morning."

"Are you mad, Julius?" asked the lady when the

## His Master Purpose

men retired. "It's even chances the excitement or the journey will kill you."

"Then I must take the chances," said Savine. "While there was a man I could trust to handle things, I let this weakness master me. Now the poor fellow's helpless, somebody must take hold before chaos ensues, and I haven't quite forgotten everything. You'll have to nurse Geoffrey, and it's no use trying to scare me. Fill my big flask with the old brandy and get my furs out instead."

Mrs Savine saw further remonstrance would be useless. She considered her brother-in-law more fit for his grave than to complete a great undertaking, but he was clearly bent on having his way; and when she hinted something of the kind, answered drily that even so he would rather die at work in the cañon than tamely in his bed. So he departed with blue lips, shivering under a load of furs in the sleigh, and after several narrow escapes of an upset, reached the camp in the dusk of a nipping morning.

"Help me out. Mr Thurstan, I am sorry to say, has met with a bad accident, and you and I have got to finish this work without him," he said to the anxious foreman. "From what he told me I can count upon your doing the best that's in you, Tom."

"I won't go back on nothing Mr Thurstan said," was the quiet answer; but when Tom from Mattawa left his new leader, whose nerveless fingers spilled half the contents of the silver cup he strove to fill, gasping beside the stove in Thurstan's quarters, he gravely shook his head.

Some days elapsed after her niece's departure for Vancouver before Mrs Savine, who had gone at once to the scene of the accident, either found leisure, or considered it judicious, to communicate with her, and so it happened that one evening Helen accompanied her hostess to witness the performance of a Western dramatic company in the opera house. In spite of second-rate acting the play was a pretty one, and each time the curtain went down Helen



## A Revelation

found the combination of bright light, pretty dresses, laughter and merry voices strangely pleasant after her isolation. Still, at times her thoughts would wander back to the ice-bound cañon and the man who had pitted himself against the thundering river in its gloomy depths. Perhaps the very contrast between this scene of brightness and luxury and the savage wilderness emphasised the self-abnegation he had shown. She knew now that he had toiled beyond most men's strength, when he might have rested, and casting away what would have ensured him a life of ease, had voluntarily chosen an almost hopeless struggle for her sake. Few women had been wooed so, she reflected, and then endeavoured to confine her attention to the play, for as yet, though both proud and grateful, she could not admit that she had been won.

Presently the son of her hostess, who joined the party between the acts, handed her a note. "I am sorry I could not get here before, but found this waiting, and thought I'd better bring it along. I hope it's not a summons of recall," he said.

Helen opened the envelope, and the hurriedly-written lines grew blurred before her eyes as she read, "I am grieved to say that Geoffrey has been seriously injured by an accident. The doctor has, however, some hopes of his recovery, though he won't speak definitely yet. If you can find an intelligent woman in Vancouver you could trust help me nurse him, send her along. Didn't write before because—"

"What is it? No bad news of your father, I hope," said her hostess, and her son, a fine type of the young Western citizen, groaned inwardly, noting the dismay in Helen's face as she answered,—

"No. His partner has been badly hurt. I must return to-morrow, and, as it is a tiresome journey, if you will excuse me, I would rather not sit out the play."

The young man also noticed that Helen seemed to shiver, while her voice was strained. Then he



## His Master Purpose

discreetly turned away his head, though he had seen sufficient to show him that certain lately-renewed hopes were vain.

"Miss Savine has not been used to gaiety of late, and I warned her she must take it quietly, especially with that ride through the ranges before her. This place is unsufferably hot, and you can trust me to see her safe home, mother," he said.

Helen's grateful, "Thank you!" was reward enough, but it was in an unenviable humour her escort returned when she sought refuge in her own room. Solitude appeared a vital necessity, for at last Helen understood. Ever since Thurstan first limped, footsore and hungry, into her life she had been alternately attracted and repelled by him. Latterly his steadfast patience and generosity had almost melted her, but circumstances had from the beginning seemed to conspire against the man, shadowing him with suspicion, and forcing him into opposition to her will. At length Mrs Savine's story made his unswerving loyalty plain, and Helen commenced to see that she could with all confidence trust her life to him, but she was proud, and knowing how she had misjudged him, hesitated still. So long as a word or smile could bring him to her feet she could postpone the day of reckoning until at least his task was finished, and allow him to prove his devotion to the hilt.

Now, however, fate had intervened, tearing away all disguise, and her eyes were opened. She knew that without him the future would be empty, and the revelation stirred every fibre of her being. Then growing suddenly cold with a shock of fear she remembered that she had perhaps already lost him for ever. It might be that another more solemn summons had preceded her own, and she might call never so sweetly and Geoffrey Thurstan would not hear. He had won his right to rest by work well done, but she—it now seemed that a lifetime would be too short to mourn him. Helen shivered at the



## A Revelation

thought, then felt suffocating, and, turning the light low, flung the long window open. Beyond the electric glare of the city, with its shapeless pile of roofs and towering poles, the mountains rose, serenely majestic, in robes of awful purity, as it were, beckoning her. The man she had learned to love too late lay among them, perhaps with the strong hands that had toiled for her folded at peace at last, and, living or dead, she must go to him. Then she remembered that the message said,—‘Hire a capable woman in Vancouver,’ and it brought her a ray of comfort. If the time was not already past she would ask nothing better than to wait on him herself. So when presently there was a hum of voices below Helen descended, quietly collected but white in face, to meet her hostess.

“I must go back to-morrow, and as it is a fatiguing journey you will not mind me retiring early,” she said.

On reaching the railroad settlement Helen found the doctor in charge of Thurstan willing to avail himself of her assistance. He had barely held his own in several encounters with her aunt, whom he suspected of endeavouring to administer unauthorised preparations to his patient, while on her part Mrs Savine freely admitted that at her age she could not sit up all night for ever. So Helen was installed, and it was midnight when she commenced her first watch.

“You will call me at once if the patient wakes complaining of any pain,” said the surgeon. “Do I think he is out of danger? Well, he is very weak yet, my dear young lady, but if you will carry out my orders, I fancy we may hope for the best. But you must remember that a nurse’s chief qualifications are presence of mind and a perfect serenity.”

“I will not fail you,” said Helen, choking back a sob of relief; and, trusting the doctor did not see her quivering face added softly, “Heaven is merciful!”

She had been prepared for a change, but she almost started at the sight of Thurstan. He lay with



## His Master Purpose

blanched patches in the paling bronze on his face which had grown hollow and lined by pain. Still he was sleeping soundly, and did not move at all when she bent over him. Then, and she felt impelled to do so, she stooped further and touched his forehead with her lips, rose with the hot blood pulsing upwards from her neck, and stood trembling, while, either dream or stirred by some influence beyond man's knowledge, the sleeper smiled, murmuring, "Helen!"

It was daylight when Thurstan awakened, and he stared as though doubtful of his senses at his nurse, until, approaching the frame of canvas where he lay, Helen, with a gentle touch, caressingly brushed the soaked hair from his forehead with cool fingers.

"I have come to help you to get better. I cannot spare you, Geoffrey," she said simply.

The sick man asked no question or betrayed further astonishment. He looked up gratefully into the eyes which met his own for a moment and grew downcast again. "Then I shall certainly cheat the doctor yet," he said.

It was under the circumstances distinctly commonplace, but speech is not the sole means of communion between mind and mind, and for the present both were satisfied, while Helen laughed and blushed girlishly when, as it were by an afterthought, the man added, "It is really very kind of you."

"You must not talk," she said with a half-assumption of authority, strangely at variance with her former demeanour. "I shall call in my aunt with the elixir if you do."

Geoffrey smiled, but the brightness of his countenance was not accounted for by his answer, "I believe she treated me with it once or twice already, and I still survive. In fact, I am inclined to fancy the doctor caught her red-handed on one occasion, and there was trouble."

Henceforth Geoffrey recovered vigour rapidly, and the days passed rapidly with Helen as she watched over him in the dilapidated frame house he had

## A Revelation

been removed to. No word of love passed between them, nor was any such necessary. The man, still weak and languid, seemed blissfully content to enjoy the present, and Helen, who was glad to see him do so, abided her time.

Meanwhile, supported by sheer force of will and a nervous exaltation that would vanish utterly when the need for it ceased, Julius Savine, leaning on his foreman's arm, or sitting propped up in a rude jumper sleigh, directed operations in the cañon. He knew he was consuming the vitality that might purchase another few years' life in as many weeks of effort, but he only desired to see the work finished, and was content to pay the price. He rarely slept and scarcely ate, holding on with desperate purpose and living on cordials, while, though progress was much slower than it would have been under Geoffrey's direction, he accomplished that purpose.

Accordingly one afternoon Thomas Savine entered the sick man's room in a state of complacent satisfaction.

"Glad to see you getting ahead so fast, and you must hurry, for we'll want you soon," he said. "The great charge is to be fired the day after to-morrow. Shackleby, who was at the bottom of the whole opposition, has also cleared out with considerable expedition. Sold up all his stock in the Company, and if his colleagues knew much about his doings, which is quite possible, they emphatically disown them. As a result I've made one or two good provisional deals with them, and expect no more trouble. In short, most everything points to a great success."

When Savine went out Geoffrey beckoned Helen to him.

"I am getting so well that you must leave me to your aunt to-morrow," he said. "You will remember your promise to fire the decisive charge for me, and I hope when you see it you will approve of the electric firing key. Tell your father I owe more to

## His Master Purpose

him than the doctor, for I should have worried myself beyond the reach of physic if he had not been there to take charge instead of me—that is to say, before you came to cure me.”

“I will go,” said Helen, with signs of suppressed agitation that puzzled Geoffrey. She knew that after that charge had been fired their present relationship as pleasant as they were, could not continue. It appeared to her the climax which all he had done and suffered led up to, and with a humility that was yet akin to pride she had determined, in reparation, to voluntarily offer him that which, whether victorious or defeated otherwise, he had won with infinite patience and loyal service.

It was early one clear cold morning when Helen Savine stood on a little plank platform perched high in a hollow of the rock walls overhanging the river opposite Thurstan's camp. Each detail of the scene burned itself into her memory as she gazed about her under a tense expectancy—the rift of blue sky between the filigree of dark pines high above, the roar of white-streaked water thundering down the gorge below and frothing high about the massive boulders and one huge fang of promontory which a touch of her finger would, if all went well, reduce to chaotic débris. Groups of workmen waited on the opposite side of the flood, all staring towards her expectantly, and Thomas Savine stood close by holding an insignificant box with wires attached to it, in a hand that was not quite steady. Tom from Mattawa was perched upon a spire of rock holding up a furling flag below, and her father leaned heavily upon the rails of the staging. No one spoke or stirred, and in spite of the roar of hurrying water a deep oppressive silence seemed to brood over cañon and camp.

“This is the key,” said Thomas Savine. “It has some notion of Geoffrey's, and he had it made especially in Toronto. You fit it in here.”

Helen glanced at the diminutive object before her and took the box. The finger grip had been fashioned



## A Revelation

out of a dollar cut clean across bearing two dates engraved upon it. The first, it flashed upon her, was the one on which she had given the worn-out man that very coin, while the other had evidently been added by some camp artificer with less skill recently.

"It's to-day," said Thomas Savine following her eyes, and Helen noticed that his voice was strained. "Geoffrey told me to get it done. Quaint idea ; don't know what it means. But put us out of suspense. We're all waiting."

Helen knew what the dates meant, and appreciated the delicate compliment. It was she who had started the daring contractor on his career who was to complete his triumph, and she drew a deep breath as she looked down into the thundering gorge realising it was a great fight he had won. Human courage and dogged endurance, inspired by him, had mocked at the might of the river, and blasting a new pathway for it through the adamant heart of the hills would roll back the barren waters from a good land that the stout of heart and arm might enter in. Swamps would give place to wheat fields, orchards blossom where willow swale had been, herds of cattle fatten on the levels of the lake, and the smoke of prosperous homesteads drift across dark forests where, for centuries, the wolf and deer had roamed undisturbed before. That was one aspect only, but she knew the man who loved her had won a greater triumph over his own nature and others' passions and infirmities.

It was with a thrill of pride the girl realised all that he had done for her, and yet for a space of seconds she almost shrank from the responsibility as she stood high before the waiting men with slender fingers tightening upon the key. The issues of what must follow its turning would be momentous, for it flashed upon her that the tiny combination of copper and silver might equally open the way to a golden future or let in overwhelming disaster upon all she loved. Then the doubt appeared an injustice to Geoffrey Thurstan



## His Master Purpose

and those who had followed him through frost and flood and whirling snow, and, with a colour on her forehead, and a light in her eyes, she pressed home the key.

Then there was bustle and hurry. Julius Savine raised his hand, and Tom from Mattawa whirled high the unfurled flag. Somebody beat upon an iron sheet invisible below, and the strip of beach in the depths of the cañon became alive with running men. Next followed a deep stillness intensified by the clamour of the river which would never raise the same wild harmonies again, for the slender hand of a woman had bound it fast henceforward under man's dominion. The hush was ended suddenly. For a second the great hollow seemed filled with tongues of flame; then, while thick smoke quenched them and crag and boulder crumbled to fragments, a stunning detonation rang from rock to rock and rolled upwards into the frozen silence of untrodden hills. Huge masses leapt out of the vapour which eddied and whirled, filling the gorge with the crash of their descent; there was a ceaseless shock and patter of smaller fragments, and then, while long reverberations rolled among the hills, the roar of the tortured river joined in and drowned the mingled din.

Rising tremendous in its last revolt, its majestic diapason was deepened by the boom of grinding rock and scream of boulders reduced to powder. The draught caused by the water's passage fanned the smoke away, and the blue vapour, curling higher, drifted past the staging, so that Helen could only dimly see a great muddy wave foam down the cañon, bursting here and there into gigantic upheavals of foam and spray. She watched it, held silent, awe-stricken by the sound and sight.

At last Mattawa Tom appeared again, and his voice was faintly audible through the dying clamours as he waved his hands. "Juss gorgeous. Gone way better than the best we hoped," he hailed.

His comrades heard and answered. They were



## A Revelation

not mere hirelings toiling for a daily wage, but men who had a stake in that region's future, and would share its prosperity, and had it been otherwise they were human still. Toiling long with stubborn patience, often in imminent peril of life and limb; winning ground as it were by inches, and sometimes barely holding what they had won; fulfilling their race's destiny to subdue and people the waste places of the earth with the faith which, when backed by modern science, is greater than the mountains' immobility, they too hailed the consummation of the struggle. So twice a roar that was scarcely articulate filled the cañon, and then growing into the expression of definite thought flung upwards their leader's name in a tempest of sound.

Helen listened, breathless, intoxicated as by wine. Julius Savine stood bolt upright with no trace of weakness about him, then seemed to shrink together and with the power gone out of him caught at the rails as he turned to his daughter.

"We have won. It is Geoffrey's doing, and my last task is done," he said in a voice that sounded faint and far-away. "Fast horses and bold riders I can trust you, too, are waiting. Tell him!"

Helen noticed a strange wistfulness in her father's glance, but she asked no question and turned to Thomas Savine. "I leave him in your charge. I will go," said she.

That afternoon passed very slowly with Geoffrey. He lay near a window, which he insisted should be opened, glancing alternately at his watch and the trail that wound down the hillside as the minutes crept by. He was not civil to the doctor, and almost abrupt with Mrs Savine, who knowing his anxiety, straightway forgave him.

"You tell me I must avoid excitement and wait the news with composure. For heaven's sake, man, be reasonable. You might as well recommend your next moribund victim to get up and take exercise," he said to the former.

## His Master Purpose

But the longest afternoon passes at length, and when the sunset glories flamed in the Western sky, and the great peaks put on fading splendours of saffron and crimson, three black moving objects became visible on a hill crest bare of the climbing firs. Geoffrey watched them with straining eyes, and it was a wondrous picture he looked upon—black gorge, darkening forest, drifting haze in the hollows, and unearthly splendours above, but he only regarded it as a fit setting for the slight figure in the foreground that swayed to the stride of a galloping horse. He was not surprised—it seemed perfectly appropriate that Helen should bring him the news—though his fingers trembled and his lips twitched.

"We shall know the best or worst in five minutes. You have done your utmost, doctor, but I'll get up and annihilate you with your own bottles if you give me good advice now," he said, and the surgeon, seeing protests were useless, laughed.

Mrs Savine said nothing. She was in a state of nervous tension, too, and merely laid her hand on the patient, restrainingly, as he strove with small success to raise himself a little. Meantime the horse came nearer, its bridle dripping with flakes of spume. Its fair rider was sprinkled with hurled-up snow, her skirt was smeared with lather, but she came on at a gallop until she reined the panting beast in beneath the window, and flinging one arm aloft sat a statuesque figure in the saddle with her flushed face turned towards the watchers. No bearer of good tidings ever appeared more beautiful to an anxious man.

"It is triumph," she said.

"Thank God!" said Mrs Savine, who slipped quietly from the room, and Geoffrey, who quivered in every limb, coughed hoarsely.

A space elapsed before Helen replaced her aunt, but brief as it was there was no sign of hurried travel about her. Her apparel was fresh and dainty, and

## A Revelation

there was even a flower from Mexico at the breast of her dress. She came straight towards the man and bent over him.

"All has gone well, better, I understand, than you even hoped for, and you have done a great thing, Geoffrey," she said. "You have saved me my inheritance—which is of small importance—and—I know all now—my father's honour. You have repaid him tenfold, and gratified his heart's desire."

"Then I am thankful," said Geoffrey very quietly, and lay still a space looking at her with a great longing in his eyes. Helen was very beautiful, more beautiful even than usual it seemed to him, and he did not know that here in the heart of the mountains she had dressed herself in robes of price. She had an offering to make, and for the sake of the man at whose feet she would lay it, would not even, so far as trifles went, depreciate the gift.

Meantime Helen's eyes fell beneath his gaze. She guessed what he was thinking and though the words "heart's desire" were accidental there was no mistaking the suggestion. Then she said slowly, "I have been unjust, proud and wilful—and I am going to do full penance. You have surely the gift of prophecy. Do you remember your last bold prediction?"

Geoffrey's lips twitched sharply. He strove to raise himself that he might see the speaker more clearly, and, still held almost helpless by his bandages, slipped back again, and Helen stooping slipped her hand into his own.

"I have come to beg you not to go away."

"There is one thing that would prevent me," and Geoffrey, bewildered, seemed to lose his usual crispness of speech, but Helen checked him.

"Therefore," and Helen's voice was very low, while surging upwards from her neck a swift wave of colour flushed both cheek and brow. "I have come of my own will to say what you asked of me.





## His Master Purpose

You have loved and served me faithfully, and it is not gratitude—only—which prompts me now."

There was a space in which Helen caught at her breath; then she lifted her head, and said, as it were, proudly, "Geoffrey Thurstan—I love you."

THE END



10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60



Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 022 362 821

STANFORD UNIVER  
CECIL H. GREI  
STANFORD, CALIFOR  
(415) 723

All books may be rec

DATE I

